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XII-XVIII
THE ROMAN
J.M.L. ROSS, M.A.

A DEVOTIONAL
COMMENTARY



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THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST LUKE

THE
"R.T.S." DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY

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A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY

Edited by the Rev. C. H. IRWIN, D.D.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO ST LUKE

XII—XVIII.

A DEVOTIONAL COMMENTARY

By the

Rev. J. M. E. ROSS, M.A.

Author of "A Devotional Commentary on 1st Peter," etc.



LONDON

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4 BOUVERIE STREET and 65 ST PAUL'S CHURCHYARD, E.C.4

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XLV

HOLY SINCERITY

"In the mean time, when there were gathered together an innumerable multitude of people, insomuch that they trode one upon another, he began to say unto his disciples first of all, Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; neither hid, that shall not be known. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the housetops. And I say unto you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him, which after he hath killed hath power to cast into hell; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him. . . . Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him shall the Son of Man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth Me before men shall be denied before the angels of God. And whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him: but unto him that blasphemeth against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven. And when they bring you unto the synagogues, and unto magistrates, and powers, take ye no thought how or what thing ye shall answer, or what ye shall say: For the Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say."—LUKE xii. 1-5, 8-12.

ARE we still at or near the Pharisee's house where, Luke xii. according to the previous chapter, the Master spoke 1-5, 8-12. such burning words? The phrase translated "in Christ and the meantime" means rather "in these circumstances"—while such attacks were going on, either

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xii. at the Pharisee's house or elsewhere. Even hostility
1-5, 8-12. has sometimes its silver lining. An attack is an advertisement. The sound of a sharp controversy cleaves the air like a bell. Perhaps that was why this innumerable company of people came together. In one sense that gave the Master an enlarged and renewed opportunity. But He had seen crowds before. His experience of a crowd had not been altogether satisfying. "A wise man," Dr Garvie says, "does not expect much from a crowd." So, even if He did not entirely turn His back upon the crowd, He turned with a new intensity to warn and teach His own disciples.

A Textual Problem.

There are certain elements in this chapter which form one of the most subtle and difficult ingredients in the whole Synoptic problem. If one were to read St Matthew first, not knowing St Luke, and then were to turn to this chapter and read it for the first time, at point after point he would be reminded of what he had read in the other Gospel, especially of what he had read in St Matt. v.-vii. and x. and xxiv. But he would not be long in discovering that the order and setting of the sayings here is quite different, e.g. why is St Luke xii. 2-9 parallel to St Matt. x. 26-28, while St Luke xii. 33, 34 is parallel to St Matt. vi. 19-21? Is this the work of the editors or were our Lord's sayings really repeated almost verbatim on different occasions? Perhaps it is best for a devotional commentary to leave this very baffling problem to the critical commentaries, partly because the latter have a good deal more space in which to deal with it. It may be that the problem

Holy Sincerity

will never be completely solved. Meantime here are Luke xii. authentic sayings of the Master which, in whatever 1-5, 8-12. order they may be arranged, are all words of eternal life, and worth our careful and prayerful study. This, without further preface, is our task.

Setting aside for the moment vv. 6 and 7 which naturally link themselves with later verses of the chapter as an exposition of Christ's doctrine of providence, we may gather together the main substance of the paragraph by treating it as a call to holy sincerity, based partly on holy fear and partly on holy trust.

1. The passage is primarily *a call to holy sincerity*. The Peril of Hypocrisy. From the house of the Pharisee, and His fresh contact with Pharisaic formality and Pharisaic hostility, He turned to His disciples, and said, "Beware ye of the leaven of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy." Leaven, which is a form of corruption, is almost always taken in the Bible as a symbol of evil, as when St Paul¹ speaks of the old leaven, the leaven of malice and wickedness. Only once is the idea redeemed to a nobler use in one of our Lord's parables—how characteristic that He should uplift a degraded word!—when He makes it a picture of the working of the Kingdom. This hypocrisy of the Pharisees was not only a corrupt thing; it was, like the leaven, a pervasive thing, damaging the standard of goodness throughout the whole community. The words that follow are almost an exact replica of St Matt. x. 26, 27. "There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, neither hid that shall not be known.

¹ 1 Cor. v. 8. Cf. Gal. v. 9. Contrast St. Luke xiii. 20.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xii. 1-5, 8-12. Therefore whatsoever ye have spoken in the darkness shall be heard in the light; and that which ye have spoken in the ear in closets shall be proclaimed upon the house-tops." But the use made is strangely different in the two cases. In Matthew the words are part of a "Fear not"; here they are part of a call to solemn fear. In Matthew they mean that the hidden truth will leap to light; here they tell that the secret falsehood will be exposed. Both things are true, though it is puzzling that identical words should be used to convey them both. It is with the latter aspect alone that we are concerned for the moment. Many voices have praised Dante's insight when in his *Inferno* he depicts the burdensomeness of the hypocrite's life. His hypocrites are doomed to wear for all eternity cowls that are gilded without but leaden within,

"O everlasting wearisome attire!"

A large part of the hypocrite's burden in this present life must be the feeling, deep down in the depths of his own soul, that his play-acting cannot always succeed: for a while he may deceive his half-blind neighbours, but God's hour must strike, God's light must shine, and he shall be revealed for what he is. No soul can bear that burden and be free or glad.

Holy Fear

2. This call to holy sincerity is partly based upon *holy fear*. Is it because the Master is about to strike this stern note that He begins so tenderly, "I say unto you, *My friends*"? We are by anticipation in the Upper Room: "I call you not servants . . . but I have called you friends." How He welcomed

Holy Sincerity

their eager, trustful faces, as compared with the sullen Luke xii. looks of hostile Pharisees, the cold indifferentism 1-5, 8-12. of a multitude gathered out of mere curiosity! "Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do"—poor fools, who aim their spears at a man and miss the real man after all! "But I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear: Fear Him, which after He hath killed hath power to cast into Gehenna; yea, I say unto you, Fear Him." Commentators differ as to the reference here: Dr Plummer says the allusion is to God: Dr A. B. Bruce believes it is to the god of this world. There are difficulties in both ways, and a lesser commentator differs from Dr Bruce with the utmost hesitation. Yet one questions whether our Lord would direct this deep moral fear of the human soul to any lower power than that of the everlasting throne. Is it inconsistent to say in one breath "Fear Him," and in another "Fear not"? It was an old inconsistency, a paradox wrapped up in the heart of true religion: for, in an age when there was more fear than love in a people's faith, Moses¹ said to his nation. "Fear not, for God is come . . . that His fear may be before you." It is the same paradox here. If you are on the right track, fear not: if you are on the wrong track, and doubly if you are trying to persuade yourself that wrong is right, then you do well to fear. And that strange eerie valley of Gehenna outside Jerusalem, where smouldering fires consumed the city's refuse, was a suggestive parable of the sanitary processes

¹ Exod. xx. 20.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xii.
1-5, 8-12.

of God's Universe, which have sometimes to be called in when man has desecrated his own life and made his dwelling-place so foul that no gentler method of cleansing will suffice.

Confession
and Denial.

The solemn words move on, still searching the disciple-conscience with a thoroughness which once experienced could never be forgotten. "Also, I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him shall the Son of Man also confess before the angels of God: but he that denieth Me before men shall be denied before the angels of God." By these words hearts have been searched and made to tremble more than by the thought of any Gehenna ever kindled. To be acknowledged by Him—it is the prize of prizes. To be denied by Him—it is the doom of dooms. John Knox's *History of the Reformation* enshrines the story of one such soul. "Upon a day, as the Laird of Lauriston . . . was reading the New Testament unto David Straton in a certain quiet place in the fields—as God had appointed, he chanced to read these sentences of our Master, Jesus Christ: 'He that denieth Me before man, or is ashamed of Me in the midst of this wicked generation, I will deny him in the presence of My Father and before His angels.' At which words, David Straton suddenly, being as one ravished, platt [*cast*] himself upon his knees, and extending both hands and visage constantly to heaven a reasonable time, at length he burst forth in these words: 'O Lord I have been wicked, and justly mayst Thou abstract Thy grace from me. But, Lord, for Thy mercy's sake, let me never deny Thee, nor

Holy Sincerity

Thy truth, for fear of death or corporal pain.' The Luke xii. issue declared that his prayer was not vain, for when 1-5, 8-12. he, with Master Norman Gourlay, was produced in judgment in the Abbey of Holyrood house, the King himself, all clad in red, being present, great labours were made that David Straton should have recanted. But he ever standing to his defence, and alleging that he had not offended, was adjudged unto the fire. . . . So was he, with Master Norman, after dinner, upon the twenty-seventh day of August, the year of God 1534, led to a place beside the Rood of Greenside, and there they two were both hanged and burned, according to the mercy of the papistical Kirk."¹ And he, and all those who have not denied below, are confessed and acknowledged above.

Still the solemn strain of warning is not exhausted. The Master would reveal to His trembling disciples the worst and lowest that the human heart could hold. Newman wrote that he sometimes shuddered at himself: Christ would have these men shudder as they confronted the ultimate sin of which the human heart was capable. They might think that this was the sin of which those were guilty who had attacked their Master, but no—there was something worse than that. "Whosoever shall speak a word against the Son of Man, it shall be forgiven him." Note the amazing assumption—the man shall need forgiveness for having spoken that word: no man can speak against the Son of Man and speak the truth. But even that sin is not unpardonable; there is a lower depth. "Unto him that blasphemeth

The Lowest
Depth.

¹ Guthrie's edition of *Knox's History*, p. 16 f.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xii. 1-5, 8-12. against the Holy Ghost it shall not be forgiven.” This dark and mysterious saying has puzzled many, and has almost driven some souls mad.¹ We may be glad that the other Synoptics set it in a clearer light by linking it with the incident which St Luke records in xi. 15-19, the case of those who accused Christ of casting out devils by the power of devils. Such souls had lost the power to distinguish between good and evil. They were in danger of saying to evil, Be thou my good. So long as this possibility remains, there is need for fear, to fear God our Judge, and to fear ourselves, the makers of our own destiny.

3. Yet the holy sincerity for which the Master calls is grounded not only in holy fear but *in holy trust*. In a few short and vivid words the Master set before these men what they would have to suffer for His sake, before synagogues and magistrates and powers. It would be difficult to be brave, difficult to be true, to be true to their own consciences and to what He had taught them of the divine word and will. But they were not to be left alone, unprompted, unhelped. “The Holy Ghost shall teach you in the same hour what ye ought to say.” What a help to courage! What a help also to sincerity, for the Holy Spirit moves and works in the realm not of

¹ Cf. the wonderful description in George Borrow’s *Lavengro*, too long for quotation, of Peter Williams, the man who had been tempted as a boy to commit the sin against the Holy Ghost, and spent many years of misery under the shadow of the belief that he had committed it. Obviously one who has fears and scruples about it has not committed it: a dead soul, like a dead body, feels no pain.

Holy Sincerity

conventions but of convictions. His fiery finger Luke xii. shrivels the falsehood that clings to us too long, 1-5, 8-12. even while He touches the truth that is in us and kindles it into a testimony. He did it for these men long ago : amid our smaller tests and temptations, He can make us also real before God and man.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

You are not unacquainted with that standing decree of heaven. "Them that honour Me I will honour : and they that despise Me shall be lightly esteemed." Never did man dishonour God, but it proved the greatest dishonour to himself. God will find out ways enough to wipe off any stain that is cast upon Him ; but you will not so easily remove the shame and sorrow from yourselves.

Richard Baxter

XLVI

CHRIST'S DOCTRINE OF PROVIDENCE

"Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows. . . . And He said unto His disciples, Therefore I say unto you, Take no thought for your life, what ye shall eat; neither for the body, what ye shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. Consider the ravens: for they neither sow nor reap; which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them: how much more are ye better than the fowls? And which of you with taking thought can add to his stature one cubit? If ye then be not able to do that thing which is least, why take ye thought for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. If then God so clothe the grass, which is to-day in the field, and to-morrow is cast into the oven: how much more will He clothe you, O ye of little faith? And seek not ye what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink, neither be ye of doubtful mind. For all these things do the nations of the world seek after: and your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things."—LUKE xii. 6, 7, 22-30.

Luke xii. It may be well to take these verses together, for
6, 7, 22-30. they enshrine our Lord's doctrine of providence.
A Lesson They not only enshrine that doctrine—they enforce
from Living it in one special way by lessons drawn from the
Things. natural world, the world which His eyes delighted
to study. Here is one of the differences between

Christ's Doctrine of Providence

Christ and Paul, His greatest servant : Paul does Luke xii. not help us to reconstruct the landscape of his 6, 7, 22-30. journeys, nor, looking through his eyes, do we see the living things which must often have haunted his path. But we can see the Galilean landscape through the eyes of Jesus : He reconstructs much of it in His parables, and the living things of air and field were His friends. Here we begin with the sparrows—the poor little sparrows sold in the market-place. Even they teach Him the lesson of providence. He does not believe that they are outside the Father's care. "Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings?" This is stronger than the parallel passage in St Matt. x. 29 : "Two sparrows for one farthing." But, as some one remarks, the intensification of the idea is also the emphasising of the lesson : they are so small that if you buy a double quantity in the market-place you will get one to the bargain. Yet—"not one of them is forgotten before God." Then we come to the ravens—favourite embodiments in Old Testament literature of the problem of existence and how God solves it : "Who provideth for the raven his food? When his young ones cry unto God, they wander for lack of meat." "He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry."¹ Our Lord had watched them well, and bade His disciples consider. "Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap, which neither have storehouse nor barn; and God feedeth them." And then it is the turn of the lilies—those flowers that bloomed for a day and yet are unfading

¹ Job xxxviii. 41; Psalm cxlvii. 9.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xii. 6, 7, 22-30. because Christ made them share in the immortality of His message. "Consider the lilies"—probably poppies would convey the meaning better, for in Canticles a lover's red lips are compared to them, but the word lilies is so consecrated by long usage, that it may stand. "Consider the lilies how they grow: they toil not, they spin not; and yet I say unto you, that Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." And it is all—this sweet philosophy drawn from sparrows and ravens and flowers—a lesson in providence, and therefore an argument for a life of simple trust and peace.

It is impossible in short compass to exhaust this teaching—so simple, so profound, so characteristic of our Lord's outlook upon life. But if we analyse a little His doctrine of providence, some of the beauty of His illustration of it may be freshly borne in upon us.

A Father's
Providence.

1. *Our Lord believed in a Divine Providence.* That is written here in every line and between the lines. He wanted His own faith to be infectious in the minds of His disciples. "He began to say unto His disciples first of all (v. 1) . . . He said unto His disciples" . . . (v. 22). He wanted to counteract their natural fears and hesitations when He sent them forth like sheep in the midst of wolves. Here was something to take the strain out of service and the menace out of danger. For His disciples as for Himself, upon a path difficult and often perilous, there was blue sky over their heads, a solid rock beneath their feet—the providence of the Father, powerful, careful, faithful.

Christ's Doctrine of Providence

Can we recapture the poetry of that familiar Luke xii. word, *Providence*? Words get worn, like coins that 6, 7, 22-30. have been long in circulation. Words fade, like photographs long exposed to the sun. Providence—it means foreseeing, forward-looking. Any home will supply its own small parable of providence: we know the peril of living from hand to mouth: there would soon be confusion and disaster if there were not planning and foresight. Dr T. R. Glover¹ thinks that Christ's doctrine of providence may have been coloured by memories of His own childhood: "the mother fired the oven and set the leaven in the meal long before the child was hungry: she looked ahead and the bread was ready. Is not this written also in the teaching of Jesus—*your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things*? God, he holds, is as little taken aback by His children's needs as Mary was by hers." The more we know of the universe in which we live the more do we feel that there must be some sort of providence not merely ruling over it but intertwined with its very being—a foreseeing and a foreplanning which put in the germ what comes out in the ultimate issue. The bread upon our table—the baker and the miller and the farmer do not provide it, except mediately and secondarily. Behind it and them is nature's miracle of life out of death. And behind that is the mystery of the seasons. And behind that is the solar system. And behind that is the whole huge problem of being and matter and movement and life. Solomon's treasures from Tyre and

¹ *The Jesus of History*, p. 28.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xii. Ophir did not come upon so long a journey as that
6, 7, 22-30. humble loaf which we crumble without a thought.
And it all takes us back either to the most irrational
of all mysteries, or to the One Who is at once Power
and Love, Creator and Providence, Sovereign and
Father. A God Who sees and foresees—that is the
poetry and the theology which we find waiting in
the doctrine of providence.

A Personal Providence

2. Our Lord believed in a *particular* providence.
It was foreign to His mind to conceive of providence
as merely a stream of tendency amid the whirl of
things, careful of the type perhaps but careless of
the individual. His view of providence was closely
linked with His view of the worth of the individual
soul before God. He could not have expressed the
idea of a particular providence much more strongly
than here, in the words of v. 6, "Are not five
sparrows sold for two farthings and *not one of them*¹
is forgotten before God?" It was a strange and
startling thing to say in a world where chance and
accident seem so often to reign, where sparrows and
men are of such small account. Yet He dared to say
it, and to add as His personal message even to the
obscurest of His disciples, "Fear not, ye are of
more value than many sparrows."

This doctrine is even harder to believe in the modern
world than it was in the Galilee of the Gospels.
The world is vaster and more complicated now.
The idea that the ruling Powers care for the type but
are quite careless as to the individual—an idea

¹ Cf. St Matt. xviii. 6. "One of these little ones." St Luke
xv. 4. "If he lose one of them."

Christ's Doctrine of Providence

which is as old as the Stoics—has returned upon us Luke xii. with fresh force through the modern outlook. The 6, 7, 22-30 multitudinousness of being oppresses us—even if He guides the whole in some vague general sense, how can He care for each? Our Lord makes a great demand upon our faith. Dean Church, however, has skilfully pointed out that the difficulty here lies more in the region of the imagination than in that of the reason. Writing of this very point, he says, “It is a difficulty of the same kind as that which made it so hard to think that the earth moved. . . . It is a failure of imagination which in this case makes the difficulty.” Then he quotes a sentence from Kinglake’s *Crimea* describing the breaking of an important matter on a man’s mental vision: “What he had previously only known, he now both knew and *imagined*”—in other words, what he had before known as a mere matter of information he was now able to apprehend vividly. Our Lord had that vivid apprehension of a particular providence which we so often lack. We must never forget that our being unable to realise the fact does not affect the fact itself, any more than the law of gravity is affected by our entire inability to picture its far-reaching effects.

Shall we make our power to picture God’s working the measure of His power to keep in touch with us? It is wiser to give to the winds our fears, and to trust the Master when He says of the Father Whom He knew so well: “He will clothe *you*, O ye of little faith.” He is the providence of the birds and flowers:

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xii.
6, 7, 22-30.

" Shall I then thinke such providence will be
Lesse friend to me ?
Or that He can endure to be unjust
Who keeps His covenant even with our dust ? " ¹

The
Providence
of the Trifle

3. Our Lord believed in *a providence that condescends to little things*. That is the prose meaning of the poetic phrase "even the hairs of your head are all numbered." It is well that it is so. Great events sometimes depend upon small ones: great doors turn on small hinges: small threads are woven into wide patterns. And our Lord means that the Father is so much in touch with the lives of His children that neither small things nor great are beyond His cognisance²; and often we may see that He has been controlling the small starting-points of great issues, and that the trivial is no longer trivial, because He has made it significant by interweaving it with His purpose.

Cicero tells a story from ancient history. In a Roman theatre a play of the poet Ennius was being performed. There was a line in the play which said that the gods did not trouble themselves about the puny affairs of men. And Cicero adds that when the actor spoke that line the audience gave their assent with loud applause. Those cynical and unbelieving plaudits sounding across the ages remind us that we are often tempted to a like verdict. But

¹ Henry Vaughan.

² Perhaps to Him there is no great or small. Cf. Dr A. Morris Stewart: "After what we have learnt about *molecules* and *atoms*, a sparrow is immense and a hair of the head is a huge thing to the microscope."

Christ's Doctrine of Providence

those who have lived near their Lord have another Luke xii.
point of view. 6, 7, 22-30.

It is told of Robertson of Brighton that he meant in his early years to be a soldier: his turning to the Christian ministry was due to the influence of a friend. That friendship was formed at the house of a certain lady, and he got to know that lady because his dog barked one night and disturbed her invalid daughter. In the after days, that came back to him as he thought over the endless problem of freedom and fate: "If I had not met a certain person, I should not have changed my profession: if I had not known a certain lady, I should probably not have met this person: if that lady had not had a delicate daughter who was disturbed by the barking of my dog: if my dog had not barked that night, I should have now been in the Dragoons or fertilising the soil of India. Who can say that these things were not ordered?"

It is best to choose the believing interpretation, and to let cynicism die with paganism. The saints are on the right track when they trace God in their lives, when they know that they can feel Him sometimes even in the little things of their lives. Only so are they delivered from being tossed about with care¹. They have heard their Master say "Fear not," and they have discovered in their own experience some of the reasons which call them to faith and not to fear.

¹ The phrase in v. 29 "Neither be ye of doubtful mind" probably means "Be not tossed about" like ships in a storm.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xii.

6, 7, 22-30.

FOR MEDITATION AND THANKSGIVING

I cannot relate the history of my life, the occurrences of my days, the escapes or dangers and hits of chance with . . . a bare gramercy to my good stars. . . . Surely there are in every man's life certain rubs, doublings, and wrenches, which pass awhile under the effects of chance, but, at the last, well examined, prove the mere hand of God.

Sir Thomas Browne

XLVII

A QUESTION OF PROPERTY

"And one of the company said unto Him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me. And He said unto him, Man, who made Me a judge or a divider over you? And He said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." - LUKE xii. 13-15.

QUESTIONS of property have been burning questions Luke xii. all through history. In Tennyson's *Northern Farmer*, 13-15. the horse's hoofs said, "Proputty, proputty," as he cantered along the road. And that most musical canter echoes over the hills and dales of time till we lose it amid the dim beginnings of things. There are corners in the long road where the canter suddenly ceases: perhaps the man on horseback has been met by some unpropertied persons who ordered him to stand and deliver. But these encounters, however they end, are but momentary: the pleasant rhythm begins again—"Proputty, proputty"—and we all stand by the wayside and nod our heads to the music of it.

The primary interest of this passage is that it records our Lord's dealings with a question of property. But it has a secondary interest of a very far-reaching kind; we want to know whether any light comes from it in regard to the relation of the

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Luke xii. Church of Christ to such questions in any age. If
13-15. there be such guidance, it is partly negative and partly positive. It is negative, for our Lord *does* nothing. It is positive, because He *says* something that pierces far.

1. *He does nothing.* It is an indication of the force of our Lord's personality, as felt by His own community, that in a case of this kind, a case for the law-courts. He should have been asked to intervene. Obviously this man, with his family quarrel burning in his heart, felt either that Christ had a keen insight entitling Him to judge, or a native authority before which an opponent was not likely to stand. But the Master did nothing. "One of the company said unto Him, Master, speak to my brother, that he divide the inheritance with me¹. And He said unto him, Man, who made Me a judge or a divider?"—Dr Moffatt renders "Arbitrator"—"over you?" The man must have gone away mildly surprised, if not positively indignant, that the matter which seemed so important to him did not arouse the interest of Jesus. Property has a way of getting attended to: why did the Master not attend to his plea? He may even have gone away with the feeling that if there was nothing in Christ for this problem, so urgent and practical, there was nothing in Christ for him at all. But our Lord took the risk of that.

Our Lord's Special Task. Why did Christ do nothing for this man? Not because of any lack of interest in life's ordinary

¹ Was the demand that the principles of Deut. xxi. 17 should be applied?

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affairs. He was no ascetic, scorning material possessions as unclean. He taught men to pray, and ¹³⁻¹⁵presumably to give thanks, for their daily bread. His little chosen company had a purse, and there was nothing essentially unclean about it even if Judas bare it. To him nothing was common or unclean: not soul alone, but body and purse and possession—all might be divine. But *He had a mission to fulfil*. And one of the secrets of success in any mission is concentration. Many would-be leaders of men have missed some of the victories they might have won because they were too much at the mercy of irrelevant claims. More than once, our Lord refused this temptation. The Fourth Gospel tells us that they would have taken Him by force to make of Him a King (vi. 15). There were many elements of political discontent in that seething land: they would have rushed to His standard like waves to the shore—how easy it would have been to summon them, overthrow existing tyrannies and build on a new basis a city and a state! But He refused: His calling was other than this. And apparently some would also have taken Christ and made Him a judge and an arbitrator, but again He knew His mission and kept to it. It is said that when Napoleon was campaigning in Palestine some one asked him whether he did not intend to go and see Jerusalem. He replied that Jerusalem was not in his plan of operations. Our Lord showed a like concentration in the opposite sense. Nothing but Jerusalem was within His plan of operations—not the mere city of stone but the greater and more

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Luke xii.
13-15.

enduring city of God, built of the redeemed lives of men. He believed that in so limiting Himself He was meeting the deepest needs of humanity, and that men needed nothing so much, even for the ultimate solution of the most practical problems, as the moral and spiritual gifts to which He could give them the clue. His plan was not really a limitation: it was the wise strategy of heaven, putting first things first and making great things central.

The Church
and Her
Calling.

The interest of this point does not end with the incident itself: it raises questions regarding the task of the Church. There were some things into which the Master refused to be drawn—perhaps His Church ought to follow His example. There has often been a tendency to exploit the Church for the ends of different sections of the community: the persistence of that tendency, even in days when men mock at her feebleness, is an indirect compliment to her power. It is often suggested that in our industrial troubles, so frequent and painful, the Church should intervene. Have those who make this suggestion ever thought it out, or are they only looking for stones to throw at the windows of an institution which they wish to discredit? Not even a Government would risk intervention in some of our industrial disputes unless they had full means of information at their disposal and the best expert advice. The Church, as such, has not the equipment for the task: if she intervened, she could only do it in an amateur fashion which would soon be resented by both sides. May it not be better that the Church

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should leave to judges and governments and experts Luke xii. their own special tasks—better that she should remain as a Temple of Peace where we may all learn to love one another more, and where the two brothers may worship God and purify their own motives in the intervals of dividing the inheritance? Dr Denney wisely and incisively has summed up the case¹: “It needs more than sympathy with justice and mercy to decide on the merits of a given dispute: it needs an accurate knowledge of the whole circumstances of the case; and that it is impossible and unnecessary for the Church to have. . . . There were things Christ refused to do: there are things that the Church, and the Ministers of the Church, should refuse in His name. We will speak often of money, if we speak as He spoke, but we will not divide the inheritance. We will not assume that, because we are Christians, we are experts in economy or legislation or in any branch of politics, any more than in science or in art. We will believe that the Church which cultivates in all its members the spirit of humanity, the spirit of liberty, justice, generosity, and mercy, will do more for the coming of God’s Kingdom than if it plunged into the thick of every conflict, or offered its mediation in every dispute. The Church does nothing unless it does the deepest things.”

2. The moral of the situation then cannot be that Christ and His servants should do nothing and let the turbulent world drift to the cataract. We have seen only the half, and less than the half, of the

¹ *Studies in Theology*, p. 201.

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whole when we have seen our Lord do nothing in regard to this case. He never leaves anything merely upon a negative level. He always aims at affirmatives. And if here He *does* nothing, deeming it outside His province, He *says* something which has a bearing on this problem and all similar problems in any age. It is scarcely true to say that even in this man's case, He does nothing: let us rather say that He does everything by making straight for the level of character. "And He said unto them, Take heed and beware of covetousness"—so He attacks a *sin*. "For a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth"—so He lays down a *principle*. And then He goes on to paint a *character*—in a parable which must be considered by itself: it is the character which He abhors—selfish, greedy, materialistic, earth-bound, but by implication it sets forth the character which He desires—generous, unselfish, detached, trustful. These things—His leadership in the attack on sinful greed, His laying down of right principle for the conduct of life, His condemnation of the false character and His skill in eliciting the true—these things are among His chosen and deliberate contributions to social welfare. And they are of enormous importance even from the political and economic standpoint. *A man's life!*—that is what our Lord is anxious about, a man's true life, not his luggage but his life, his well-being, his wealth in the correct interpretation of that much-abused word. So by His own chosen path He approaches that tangled social problem which is too often viewed as a mere

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question of property; and while it is right and Luke xii. needful for the Christian citizen in his citizenship ^{13-15.} to approach the problem from the legislative and economic end, the task of Christian churchmen in their churchmanship is to see that the end by which our Lord approached it is not neglected now.

So He leads us away from two different sets of people whose view of this matter is either false or incomplete. First, there are those who find the whole seat of our social trouble in *property itself*. Rousseau set that fashion one hundred and fifty years ago and many have followed it since then. "Let us leave illusion," he wrote, "it is property that divides us into two classes, rich and poor: the first will always prefer their fortune to that of the state, while the second will never love a government or laws that leave them in misery." But in spite of Rousseau it is not property itself that is at fault, but that queer twist in human nature which our Lord set Himself to straighten out, the covetousness which either acquires property greedily without thought of the rights of others, or uses it selfishly without thought of others' needs. And second, there are those who think that our whole system can be changed and our whole problem solved *by legislation*. Only fools would belittle legislation, or substitute for its reasoned and orderly processes the fierce lava-flow of what is called "direct action." But our trouble goes deeper than legislation can reach. Ideal legislation without a right spirit is so much machinery without power to drive it. Here again is the justification of the Church in the task

Two Vast
Mistakes.

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Luke xii. 13-15. to which her Lord has called her--the production of character unworldly, unselfish, public-spirited. It may seem a limited task, when she is being beckoned by many people to many other things. It is really illimitable, alike in its thrilling possibilities, and in its practical effect upon social welfare.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

O God, the protector of all that trust in Thee, without Whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy; increase and multiply upon us Thy mercy; that, Thou being our ruler and guide, we may so pass through things temporal that we finally lose not the things eternal. Grant this, O heavenly Father, for Jesus Christ's sake our Lord, Amen.

The Book of Common Prayer

XLVIII

THE RICH FOOL

"And He spake a parable unto them, saying, The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully : And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits ? And he said, This will I do : I will pull down my barns, and build greater ; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods. And I will say to my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years ; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee : then whose shall those things be, which thou hast provided ? So is he that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God."

—LUKE xii. 16-21.

WE have already listened to the warning against Luke xii. covetousness, but now we listen to it again, 16-21. characteristically turned into the form of a story. A Parable and a Psalm. We may bless the blundering of the claimant for the property, since it gave us not only the counsel but the parable. Not here alone do we marvel at the casual origin of so much of our Lord's most beautiful and perfect teaching. Chance seemed to roll pebbles to His feet, but when He picked them up they had become pearls. We can only admire with reverence the fullness of the mind of the Master, the readiness of its resources, the perfection of its working. And here in a picture painted with few, strong words He made immortal the lesson of the

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xii.
16-21.

moment. We see the ugliness of the sin of covetousness with double clearness since it is incarnated for us in a character. We hunger more eagerly after the life of detachment when we see the entanglement of a soul among things seen and temporal.

The parable seems to be haunted by echoes of an ancient psalm—the forty-ninth. The spirit of psalm and parable seems identical and there are some close correspondences of thought and phrase. “They that trust in their wealth and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches”—here is their type and representative in the man who says, “What shall I do, because I have no room where to bestow my fruits?” “The fool and brutish person perish and leave their wealth to others”—here again is one of them, a great man in his own eyes, and no doubt bulking largely in the estimation of his poorer neighbours, and yet looking so small and mean in the ultimate issue of his life. And there seems an affinity also between the part of the psalm which dimly hints the preciousness of the soul—“the redemption of their soul is precious and must be let alone for ever”—and this picture of a man whose abundant wealth could not buy off his soul from its last account. Our Lord had seen in life many a commentary upon the psalm—self-made, purse-proud swaggerers, dying and carrying nothing away, their glory not descending after them. And the parable crystallised His thought of them—ininitely pitiful, yet searching as the very fires of judgment.

A Soul self-centred.

1. We study here *the portrait of the self-centred man*. That is really all that can be brought against

The Rich Fool

him. "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully"—nothing is said about any wicked dealing or unjust gain. "And he thought within himself, saying, What shall I do, because I have no room to bestow my fruits? And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods." One listens almost with amusement to the purring and placid egotism of the phrases: the man's character emerges more and more clearly with every recurring possessive, "my . . . my . . . my . . . my . . ." Perhaps he was a descendant of Nabal, who said, "Shall I take *my* bread and *my* water, and *my* flesh that I have killed for *my* shearers, and give it unto men whom I know not whence they be?" There is a religion of the possessive pronouns, as Luther says, but there is an irreligion of the possessive pronouns too. No doubt there were such men to be seen in our Lord's day when the Roman peace gave a chance for the quiet accumulation of fortunes, undisturbed by war's alarms. There have been such in almost every age, from the time of Psalm xlix. to the age of the modern profiteer. This man was very wise and clever. But he made two great mistakes. He forgot the uncertainty of all human affairs—never having realised the shortness of time nor seen "eternity posting on with wings." And he forgot that material things, however abundant, however meritoriously acquired, however securely invested, cannot satisfy a heart that was made for the infinite. If a man's life had really consisted in the abundance of the things which he

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xii.
16-21.

possessed, then this man would have been a superb illustration of vitality, but, because true life is not measured by property at all, it was possible for him to be dead even while he lived. "As poor, yet making many rich: as having nothing, and yet possessing all things," St Paul says in daring paradox; and, a thousand times over, his words have been illustrated in the lives of God's humble saints. But the Devil has his own parody of that paradox: he has his victims of whom it may be said that they are wealthy yet make nobody rich, they possess everything yet are poor with it all. Here is one of them before us—a portrait 1,900 years old, yet unfaded and truthful still.

A Life cut
short.

2. And then with fascinated awe-struck hearts we watch *the intervention of the Fates*. The man was still purring on his placid way. "I will say unto my soul, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years: take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry. But God said unto him, Thou fool, this night"—how ironic is the contrast between the "many years" of the man's own expectation and the "this night" of the divine decision!—"this night they are requiring thy soul of thee." It might seem that to speak of the Fates intervening is to bring a heathenish vocabulary into the interpretation of the message of Christ. Yet there is something curiously like that conception in this vague plural - "they." What watchers are these on the rich man's threshold? Who gives them their authority and power? Who tells them the moment to produce the shears and cut the thread? They intervene,

The Rich Fool

and then : " Whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ? " Luke xii.
16-21.

The " they " is only a manner of speaking. It is God Who is at work. " God said, ' Thou fool.' " It was God Who had the first word on this man's case, giving him his chance, his harvests, his barns, his all : there are no self-made men. And it was God Who had also the last word on his story, fixing the hour when his opportunity should be ended and his account given in. God has the last word on all human pomp and splendour, and never does it look so insignificant as when death ends it suddenly and He who gave poor, proud man a soul recalls that soul to Himself.

There is some uncertainty as to the precise meaning of our Lord's closing aphorism : " So is he that layeth up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God." Does this mean not rich *in honorem Dei*, not using his material wealth to God's glory, not generous to God and man ? Or does it mean not rich in spiritual wealth ? Dr Moffatt seems to favour the latter interpretation by rendering it " the riches of God," but perhaps the former is more in tune with the habitual line of teaching in this Gospel. Jeremy Taylor has a tremendous phrase about those who are " going back in the accounts of eternity." It is possible to go forward in the accounts of this world—in the daily ledger, in the monthly balance at the bank, in the investments which are the modern equivalent of barns ; and yet to be going back all the time in the accounts of eternity, because, as the years pass and character

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xii.
16-21. hardens and the world absorbs and fascinates us, there may be less love in the life, and less service. If that be so, then even the going forward in this world's accounts may be paid for at too great a price. "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?"

"As poor and making many rich : as having nothing and yet possessing all things." Yes—this is the better portion : this is the wealth of the wise.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Worldliness is an immense number of allowable details issuing in an unallowable end. . . . Things which are not wrong in themselves become wrong when they stand between us and God, unspeakably wrong when they usurp God's place in our hearts.

F. W. Faber

THE KINGDOM OF QUEST AND OF PROMISE

"But rather seek ye the kingdom of God : and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock : for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell that ye have and give alms : provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."—LUKE xii. 31-34.

WE have been dealing with our Lord's doctrine of Luke xii. providence, and He will not allow us to forget that 31-34. at the heart of His Father's providence there is an ethical and spiritual purpose. Dear to God is the welfare of His children, but still dearer to His heart is that Kingdom in the serving of which their only true welfare is to be found. St Paul is at one with his Master when he says that all things work together for good—but he does not leave us with a vague and misty optimism : he confines his happy dogma to "them that love God, to them who are called according to His purpose." Though the vocabularies of the Apostle and of His Lord are very different, the process of thought here is almost the same. "Your Father knoweth that ye have need," but, if you would come in under the sure shelter of that

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Luke xii. 31-34. comfort, see that your life is running along the line of the Father's purpose: "Seek ye the Kingdom of God." And if you seek the great thing the lesser things will come.

Help Our
Unbelief.

Perhaps we ought to meet this doctrine, as it seeks admittance to our minds, with a prayer for the increase of our faith. Dr Martineau says that it might have been easier to believe such teaching had we listened to Christ on the Galilean hill slope, had we been able to follow the sweep of His hand as He pointed to the lilies and the birds, had peaceful landscape and bounteous fields supplied the commentary. It is harder to believe amid our modern industrial environment, in the midst of a life which is apt to have strain and struggle in every fibre of it; the atmosphere of factories, docksides, and city streets makes it hard for us to receive a message like this with the simple trustfulness which the Master desires to create. Yet believe we must, if we would be disciples of the Divine Teacher, if we would be children of the Divine Father.

What comes
First?

"Seek ye the Kingdom." The word "first" which is included in St Matthew's version is omitted here, but it is implied in the whole emphasis and proportion of the counsel. Something must be put first if life is not to be an irremediable confusion. Even setting aside things which in themselves are sinful or unworthy, there must be in every life a very complicated mixture of elements, interests, and aims. There will be things material and things intellectual: there will be duties personal and duties social: there will be duties necessary and duties

The Kingdom of Quest and Promise

expedient and duties more debatable: there will be Luke xii. interests of the market-place and interests of the 31-34. household, and interests of the personality: there will be the clash of all the influences which this world can supply mingled with the appeals which come from beyond the stars. If all these are on an equal level, here is confusion worse confounded: something must be dominant in order to make life a coherent unity. To quote Dr Martineau again, there are in every life "ends that rule" and "ends that serve." Two men living in the same community side by side may be following many ends in common: they have both to live: they have both to support their homes: they share many purposes and many interests. But in each case there are ends that rule—conceptions and ideals which supply life with its guiding stars. The other ends, the ends that only serve, are shaped and controlled by these, and if there be a difference in the ruling passion, the two lives, alike in many external details, may be as different as east and west, or as light and darkness.

It is pathetic to notice, as one turns over the pages of the long history of human thought, how acutely men in all ages have felt this need: some purpose must be regnant, if life is to be anything more than a mere drift before shifting winds. Hence the old quest for the chief good—the thing which will make life satisfying instead of being merely confusing. Aristotle went on that quest, finding the chief good in the "golden mean." The author of Ecclesiastes went on it too, surveying many plans

The
Summum
Bonum

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xii.
31-34.

and projects with a verdict which was little more than a cry of despair. Now the Master steps quietly before us, to tell us that He has solved the riddle: He has found the chief good. It is the Kingdom of God. Three things may be very briefly pointed out with regard to this idea. (1) It is a *theological* conception. Its lights and colours come from beyond the limits of the world. The very name is a reminder that the great quest fails if it leads men only up the blind alley of the seen and temporal. (2) It is a *social* conception. The word "Kingdom" is a social word: it enshrines an idea transcending the mere individual: it at once completes the personal experience in a corporate life, and liberates the individual soul in a social service. (3) And it is an *ethical* conception. Here again the first Gospel, in its fuller report of the saying, is exegetic of the third. The chief good, the thing that is worth making central, is the Kingdom of God "and His righteousness." These two things are not to be separated. All the obedience that is involved in the Fatherhood of God, all the kindness and helpfulness that are involved in the brotherhood of man—these things are the righteousness of the Kingdom. And though we were to search heaven and earth, the past and the present, for the chief good, we should never find anything better or more satisfying than this.

The
Kingdom
of Promise.

It is a singularly beautiful turn of thought, which passes from the Kingdom as the object of our quest to the Kingdom (v. 32) as the gift of God's promise. "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good

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pleasure to give you the Kingdom.” We sometimes Luke xii. need some re-assuring, not merely on the point of 3¹-34. the lesser and lower things which come with the Kingdom, but as to the Kingdom itself. The Kingdom is often hard to believe in. The world denies it. The aspect of things seems to be a mockery of the very idea. So an assurance such as that of v. 32 has been greatly needed, and in difficult days has been very dear. Its meaning has been moulded by circumstances in two main ways. Sometimes it has been close to the heart of the Church in days of frustration and delay, to remind the servants of Christ that their labour is not in vain. There are two sides to every truth, and there are two sides to the Kingdom. We go to seek it, but it also comes forth to meet us. And even when we think our work is a failure, God on His side is working to make it a true success. So where pioneers have gone in lonely faith, God raises up a multitude to do Him service: the handful of corn upon the top of the mountains has fruit that shakes like Lebanon. Sometimes again the same message of comfort has taken a more transcendental form—when this world has done its best or worst, whether in material comfort or in spiritual success. The Master’s “Fear not” has followed His disciples through all their vicissitudes and overtaken them in their uttermost extremity. The Kingdom that they needed then was beyond the realm of time and change, and they had the word of their Lord that it should not fail them—the “Father’s good pleasure” was a guarantee which neither life nor death could cancel.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xii.

31-34.

The Spirit of
Detachment.

The fact is that, however much life gives or withholds, the pilgrim of this quest is ever on the way towards something better. That is why he can afford to be so detached in regard to earthly possessions. If we can get that spirit of detachment into ourselves, or rather open our hearts to receive it from God, the essence of the message of vv. 33 and 34 is already realised in us. "Sell that ye have and give alms." There are puzzles here for those who take this as a rule to be universally applied and insist upon a "literal obedience." The first puzzle is this—that Christ did not apply this rule to everybody: He applied it to the rich young ruler, but He did not compel Martha and Mary and Lazarus to sell their home at Bethany. The second is this, that when the Church at Jerusalem tried an experiment in communism it did not last very long, and it apparently left so many poor saints that Paul had to organise collections for them. The third is this, that if we all adopted this as an imperative command, it would be impossible to carry it out, for the plethora of goods to be sold would destroy its own market. Our Lord is not enforcing a literal rule: He is in His vivid way, according to His frequent method, giving a vivid instance of a great principle—that of sitting lightly by a lower good so as to be free to answer when a greater good calls. So we are brought back to the point at which we were—the question of what we put *first*. There are ends that rule and there are ends that serve. Our Lord's way of putting that truth is in these immortal words, "Where your treasure is

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there will your heart be also." The ruling end Luke xii. creates its own ruling ambition, and other things 31-34. fall into their proper place. If it is God's will that they remain, they can be used and enjoyed. If it is His will that they be given up, they can be laid at His feet a willing sacrifice. But the soul marches on, and does not miss its Kingdom, which is well won though all the world were lost for the sake of it.

The whole passage, as we have seen, is a great call to faith. It is also a call to admire our Lord's own faith, so clear-eyed and sublime. "All these things," He had said—the lower, temporal, tangible things—"do the nations of the world seek after." He had seen the emissaries of these nations travelling the Roman highways of Palestine, seeking wealth and power and fame, and often perhaps returning with the disillusioned look of those who had partaken of their heart's desire and found it as dust and ashes between their teeth. His own feet were on another track, and along that high path He called His disciples too. There are panics sometimes among earthly speculators when securities depreciate and treasures that seemed safe take to themselves wings. There is no panic in the soul of Christ either for Himself or for the souls that have staked all upon following Him. "Bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth"—here is assurance trebly sure. On August 23, 1668, Mr Samuel Pepys went to church and heard a sermon from the text, "Seek first the Kingdom." "A very excellent persuasive, good and moral

The Master's
Confidence.

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Luke xii.
31-34.

sermon. He showed, like a wise man, that righteousness is a surer moral way of being rich than sin and villany." For this once only we may accept Mr Pepys as a spiritual teacher, with the proviso that we shall define for ourselves the riches that we covet. To go quietly forward with the tasks of the Kingdom, knowing that the God Whom we serve will not fail us nor forsake us, giving us our portion here and our greater portion hereafter—is not this enough? The thief cannot break this security: the moth cannot corrupt this portion.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Heavenly Father, Who hast adopted us to be Thy children, grant that we, passing through this corrupt world in such integrity and cleanness that none have any just occasion to complain of us, may in the end be partakers of the celestial heritage prepared for us in the heavens, through Jesus Christ our only Saviour. Amen.

Ancient Scottish Collect

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THE VIGIL OF THE SERVANTS

“ Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning ; And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding ; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately. Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching : verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them. And if he shall come in the second watch, or come in the third watch, and find them so, blessed are those servants. And this know, that if the goodman of the house had known what hour the thief would come, he would have watched, and not have suffered his house to be broken through. Be ye therefore ready also : for the Son of Man cometh at an hour when ye think not. Then Peter said unto Him, Lord, speakest Thou this parable unto us, or even to all ? And the Lord said, Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season ? Blessed is that servant, whom his lord when he cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that he will make him ruler over all that he hath. But and if that servant say in his heart, My lord delayeth his coming ; and shall begin to beat the men-servants and maidens, and to eat and drink, and to be drunken ; The lord of that servant will come in a day when he looketh not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and will cut him in sunder, and will appoint him his portion with the unbelievers. And that servant, which knew his lord’s will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes. But he that knew not, and did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes. For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required : and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more.”—LUKE xii. 35-48.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xii.
35-48.

THERE is an underlying affinity between this passage and what has gone before, which makes the transition not so abrupt as it may appear upon the surface to be. In a scheme of thought of which a living Person is the centre and crown the moral always tends to become eschatological: existence cannot be a stagnant pool, still less a vicious circle: every process must come to its climax; the various roads of life must converge towards a goal; and all our acts are not for a moment but for the eternal records, not for themselves but for the verdict of a Master. Here we have passed from the covetousness of the children of this world to the higher ambitions of those who seek and serve the Kingdom of God; and it is but a short step from the promise of the Kingdom to the coming of the King. It is not easy to cut up into sections a passage which but rings the changes on one great theme, but at least let us notice the salient points in this summons to the vigilant life.

Loins and
Lamp.

1. The essence of it all is in the double opening thought of the girt loins and the lit lamps. "Let your loins be girded about and your lamps burning and ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately." The long flowing Eastern raiment encumbered the limbs: the girt loins were a symbol of readiness for action. Elijah girded his loins when he ran before Ahab's chariot; Job was bidden to gird his loins when God would speak with him, Jeremiah when he went forth to his prophetic

The Vigil of the Servants

task, Peter when the prison doors were opened to Luke xii. let him escape.¹ "Of all temptations I ever met 35-48. with in my life," John Bunyan wrote of himself, "to question the being of God and the truth of His Gospel is the worst, and worst to be borne. When this temptation comes *it takes my girdle from me* and removes the foundation from under me." When the picture of the lit lamp is added to that of the girded loin we get a perfect parable of readiness and expectation: indeed, we get the parable of the ten virgins in miniature. Humanity ungirt is a sorry sight. There is "loose living" of various kinds and grades, life that has never pulled itself together. The servants of the King must be of a different pattern. Browning has in *The Statue and the Bust* the story of a man and woman who meant to commit a sin, but they were so cold-blooded and half-hearted about it that they only dreamed it and never did it. The poet has no patience with such spineless futility.

"Let a man contend to the uttermost
For his life's set prize, be what it will!
The counter our lovers staked was lost
As surely as if it were lawful coin:
And the sin I impute to each frustrate ghost
Is—the unlit lamp and the ungirt loin."

And if even they make a poor showing who are half-hearted in folly much more do they who are half-hearted in good.

"Though the end in sight was a vice, I say,
You of the virtue (we issue join)
How strive *you?* *De te fabula!*"

¹ 1 Kings xviii. 46; Job xxxviii. 3; Jer. i. 17; Acts xii. 8.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xii. 35-48. Least of all must the servants of the Highest commit that double sin against which the poet raises a prophet's protest. They owe it to their own dignity; they owe it to their Master's honour: "let your loins be girded about and your lamps burning."

The Sudden
Fest.

2. Two pictures follow of the suddenness with which the climax may come. One is the vision of the master returning to his household, in the second watch, or in the third watch—perhaps the times when human heads are apt to be most drowned in sleep. Twice our Lord emphasises the blessedness of the servants who even then are found awake and vigilant: "verily, I say unto you, that He shall gird Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them," a picture that would be strange in its condescension did we not know of its counterpart in the Upper Room, "He took a towel and girded Himself . . . and began to wash the disciples' feet." The other is the vision of the thief breaking through—a favourite New Testament figure for the unexpected.¹ And then the lesson of both pictures is summed up in the brief clear warning, which has come ringing down the ages, with so many lessons of experience and stirrings of conscience to reinforce its power. "Be ye therefore ready also; for the Son of Man cometh at an hour when ye think not." It is obvious that the sudden, unexpected happenings of life are often, by their very suddenness, judgments. Psychologists tell us that our thoughts, feelings, and desires group

¹ Compare 1 Thess. v. 2, Rev. iii. 2, etc.

The Vigil of the Servants

themselves in systems, and that at the call of a **Luke xii.** sudden emergency it is our favourite system, the **35-48.** system which we work oftenest and most easily, that is likeliest to leap to the surface. So a *sudden* peril would reveal our habitual trustfulness, or the lack of it. A *sudden* temptation would reveal our moral principle, or the lack of it. And—for the laws of life are the same to the end and uttermost—if the Master were suddenly to come, the very suddenness of His coming would give us no time to take up a posture or to act a part: our true selves would stand revealed. Should we be found dull-hearted, heavy-headed, careless? Or should we be afraid, as those who had not made their peace? Or should we be prepared—with loins girt and lamps lit, welcoming no Stranger but a Master and Friend? They are wise who give themselves no vacation from their vigilance and no discharge from their loyalty: the verdict of that ultimate hour is being made in the fleeting moments of to-day.

3. The rest is Simon Peter's interruption and the Master's reply. "Then Peter said unto Him, Lord, A Warning to the Church speakest Thou this parable unto us, or even to all?" Perhaps the glowing picture of the happy servants, honoured and even served by their Master, had kindled Peter's ambition and he was anxious that not too many outsiders should share a privilege so great. Our Lord, according to this account, answered indirectly—a little after the fashion of that incident in the end of the Fourth Gospel, when this same Peter said to Jesus, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" and Jesus answered, "If I will that

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xii.
35-48.

he tarry till I come, what is that to thee? Follow thou Me." If there was a direct answer it must have been in some such words as St Mark gives, "And what I say unto you, I say unto all, Watch." But according to St Luke's version the answer was indirect. Christ answered Peter's question with another. "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his lord shall make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of meat in due season?" That was the kind of function that Peter and his comrades aspired to fulfil, and were indeed called to fulfil. But it was a great responsibility, leading far, far up or far, far down. To be faithful to that high calling leads to heights yet greater: "Blessed is that servant, whom his Lord when He cometh shall find so doing. Of a truth I say unto you, that He will make him ruler over all that He hath"—again a parable in a nutshell, the parable of the talents in small bulk. But to be unfaithful!—this Master is very searching, very terrible, as with merciful mercilessness He lays bare once more the worst that may happen—the disloyalty, the cruelty, the rioting, the doom. "To beat the men-servants and maidens, and to eat and drink and to be drunken"—were these words too strong for some of the things that have happened in Christian history even under the shadow of the Church, worldliness, licentiousness, tyranny, until the thing stank in the nostrils of heaven and God's cleansing judgments were poured forth? In that passage of Knox's *History of the Reformation*, quoted a few pages back, which tells how David Straton did not

The Vigil of the Servants

deny his Lord, two sentences were omitted. They **Luke xii.** are given now. "When David Straton perceived 35-48. his danger, he asked grace of the King, which he would willingly have granted unto him. But the Bishops proudly answered that the King's hands were bound, and that the King had no grace to give to such as by their law were condemned." When such pride and cruelty ruled the Church, was it not time that Christ should come to Scotland? And He came. In judgment and in mercy, He came.

If, as is said above, Christian morality always completes itself in eschatology, it is also true that eschatology has sometimes needed to be moralised. Christ anticipates most things and He anticipates that. Men's consciences have often been uneasy at the hard and fast divisions proclaimed by popular belief; they have not been able to see the moral life of men as if it were all unrelieved black or dazzling white: they have not been able to shut their eyes to the varying shades of grey. Our Lord's doctrine of the many stripes and few stripes is, in simple parable form, a doctrine of gradation—a reminder that the Judge of all the earth has His eyes upon the facts of the case and will do right. And deep down in the souls of men there is an instinct which tells that it must be so, and which responds to the solemn principle of the Divine judgment: "Unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall much be required: and to whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more."

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xii.

35-48.

Old Faith in
New Form.

The Son of Man cometh! What meaning is it possible for our minds to put into these words to-day? Two things must be confronted with honesty and courage. One is the long lapse of time. The "little while" has grown to many centuries.

"The Porter watches at the gate,
The servants watch within;
The watch is long betimes and late,
The prize is slow to win.
'Watchman, what of the night?' but still
His answer sounds the same:
'No daybreak tops the utmost hill
Nor pale our lamps of flame.'"

It must be remembered that this does not of itself discredit the Master, for in the very giving of the idea of an *advent* to His disciples (v. 40) He also gave them the idea of a *delayed* advent (v. 45). The other, and the more serious difficulty, is the change of cosmogony. These ancient words were spoken into a world very different from the universe as we know it, and conceptions that were easy to grasp when there was a flat earth in men's thoughts with an inverted dome of sky are at any rate much more elusive when we know that we stand on a revolving ball moving amid uncounted worlds. Yet the same God reigns now as then, and He who began His work will complete it. It ought to help us that the Church, in her great creeds and songs, has been guided to hold not by curious details or apocalyptic furnishings but by the essence of the truth—as in the *Te Deum*, "We believe that Thou shalt come to be our Judge." We can hold that firmly, yet with

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an elasticity which will allow God to fulfil His Luke xii. promises in ways that are not bound by our pictures 35-48. or prepossessions. And the old faith still completes itself in the old prayer, "We therefore pray Thee, help Thy servants Whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious blood: make them to be numbered with Thy saints in glory everlasting."

FOR MEDITATION AND THANKSGIVING

Expecting Him, my door was open wide;
Then I looked round,
If any lack of service might be found,
And saw Him at my side;
How entered, by what secret stair,
I know not, knowing only He was there.

T. E. Brown

LI

FIRE ON THE EARTH AND SIGNS IN THE SKY

“I am come to send fire on the earth; and what will I, if it be already kindled? But I have a baptism to be baptized with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished! Suppose ye that I am come to give peace on earth? I tell you, Nay; but rather division: For from henceforth there shall be five in one house divided, three against two, and two against three. The father shall be divided against the son, and the son against the father; the mother against the daughter, and the daughter against the mother; the mother in law against her daughter in law, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And He said also to the people, When ye see a cloud rise out of the west, straightway ye say, There cometh a shower; and so it is. And when ye see the south wind blow, ye say, There will be heat; and it cometh to pass. Ye hypocrites, ye can discern the face of the sky and of the earth; but how is it that ye do not discern this time? Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right? When thou goest with thine adversary to the magistrate, as thou art in the way, give diligence that thou mayest be delivered from him; lest he hale thee to the judge, and the judge deliver thee to the officer, and the officer cast thee into prison. I tell thee, thou shalt not depart thence, till thou hast paid the very last mite.”—LUKE xii. 49-59.

Luke xii.
49-59.

FROM that day which is surely coming, though no man knows its date, the Master returns to the present hour, its duties and obligations. Sometimes when His servants are meditating of things above or things to come, their meditations are interrupted by some urgent and business-like angel who says to

Fire on Earth and Signs in the Sky

them, "Why stand ye gazing up into heaven?" Luke xii
Even so did the Master's own thoughts recall Him 49-59.
from the far-off time of reckoning, sifting and
crowning to some of the tasks that would not wait.
The day of judgment would come in God's time and
way, but for the Master and His servants much lay
between.

1. His thoughts turn to *His own calling*. The The Casting of the Fire. Greek sentence begins with the word "fire" as if to give it all possible emphasis: "Fire! I am come to cast it upon the earth." It reminds one of Blaise Pascal's strange memorandum of the night of November 23, 1654, when he wrote of his deepest spiritual experience, and started off abruptly with the word "feu"—fire! Pascal wrote from the recipient's point of view: the Master here speaks as one who has come to bestow. What are we to understand by the fire of which He tells us? Is the fire the same thing as the "division" of which we shall be told in a moment? Or is it the holiness which provokes hostility and strife? Perhaps Dr Bruce is right in choosing a completer idea than either of these: the fire is the fire of a new faith, which like all earthly movements must begin as a small flicker even though it may ultimately grow to a great conflagration. The end of the verse is difficult, but the weight of scholarly judgment interprets it as meaning, "Would it were kindled already!" If the fire were once really kindled, and spreading in tongues of flame from nation to nation, then the task of the Christ would be accomplished and He might go home to His rest.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xii.
49-59.

His
Straitened
Soul

2. But He has to face what the task *involves for Himself*. Survey the whole scene contained in vv. 49, 50, and we see, as Dr Plummer puts it, not only "the world lit up with flames" but "Christ bathed in blood." "But I have a baptism to be baptised with; and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!" Perhaps the word "straitened" is as good a rendering as any of the Greek verb—the same verb as is rendered "taken" in viii. 37, when we are told of the Gadarenes that they were "taken with a great fear." When some one has to go through the waves and the billows, it is small wonder that something clutches at his heart upon the brink. When some one has to concentrate upon a painful, urgent task, his mind seems to gather itself up into the longing to have it over and done. Perhaps these not unfamiliar experiences help us to understand the Master's mood at this precise moment: "how am I distressed till it is all over," Dr Moffatt renders the phrase. There was something in His very bearing at a certain stage of His ministry which impressed and overawed the disciples: "they were in the way going up to Jerusalem: and Jesus went before them: and they were amazed: and as they followed they were afraid."¹ It is a most curious descriptive touch: the look on the face of Jesus is not described to us, but we are allowed to see its reflection in the faces of His disciples. That look notwithstanding, even some of those temporarily over-awed disciples could take His baptism lightly and jauntily enough. "Jesus

¹ St Mark x. 32.

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said unto them ; Can ye drink of the cup that I Luke xii. drink of, and be baptised with the baptism that 49-59.

I am baptised with ? ” “ And they said unto Him, We can,”¹ poor short-sighted children playing round the edge of a great gulf and thinking they could easily leap out again. The Master Himself could not take it lightly—He saw too far into it for that : this was the meaning of the great cry wrung from His heart, “ How am I straitened ! ”

3. He thinks of the *consequences for others*. For War on the there follows the great warning of the disruptive, heels of sundering force of Christianity. We might almost Peace. expect this, even in listening to some of the Master's most peaceful and peace-giving words, for in a moral universe it is not easy to escape from conflict. Mr Neil Munro, in his fine story, *Gilian the Dreamer*, describes a boy of an imaginative type awakened at daybreak by the drums of a regiment making a forced march through his highland village. “ The boy sat up and listened with breath caught and straining ears. No, no, it was nothing ; the breeze had gone round ; the night was wholly still ; what he had heard was but in the fringes of his dream. But stay, there it was again, the throb of a drum far off in the night. It faded again in veering currents of the wind. then woke more robust and unmistakable. The drums ! the drums ! the drums ! The rumour of the sea was lost. No more the wind sighed in the pears. All the voices of nature were dumb to that throb of war. . . . For with the call of the drums there entered into him all the sentiment of

¹ St Mark x. 28 f.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xii.
49-59.

the family of that house, the sentiment of the soldier, the full proclamation of his connection with a thousand years of warrior clans. The drums! the drums! the drums!" This passage might be taken as a parable of the way in which the sound of conflict enters into life's quietest corners. And even when we sit on the Mount of Beatitudes and hear the Master say, "Blessed are the peacemakers," we must not be surprised if soon we hear Him change His note, and say, "Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace but a sword." The sound of the drums is already here! Where St Matthew gives us the vivid figure of the sword, St Luke's report gives the more general word "division," but the meaning is the same. In the authority of Christ, in the consuming passion of the new faith, a disruptive influence had come which would invade even the tenderest and most sacred relationships. We need not tarry over the details in the description of the divided house—a description which is given for emphasis rather than for analysis. It all echoes and re-echoes the warning of an ancient prophet¹, "The son dishonoureth the father, the daughter riseth up against her mother, the daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law; a man's enemies are the men of his own house." That prophet also, in his own day and generation had heard the sound of the drums—had seen that those who stand for moral realities must be prepared for conflict with the children of false tradition. And Christ saw this yet more clearly for

Micah vii. 6.

Fire on Earth and Signs in the Sky

Himself and for His disciples. That was the truth Luke xii. that burned itself into the soul of C. H. Sorley, one 49-59 of the young soldier-poets who fell in the Great War of 1914-1918:

“ We pray for rest and beauty that we know we cannot earn,
And ever we are asking for a honey-sweet return ;
But God will make it bitter, make it bitter, till we learn
That with tears the race is run.

And did not Jesus perish to bring to man, not peace,
But a sword, a sword for battle, and a sword that shall not
cease ?

Two thousand years have passed us. Do we still want
peace,

Where the sword of Christ has shone ? ”

That stern law still holds and must hold, so long as there is an error left with which truth must do battle, so long as there is a sin left against which the Captain of the Lord's host must lead His faithful soldiers. There can be no easy-going programme for the Kingdom of truth and love.

For a moment, ere the chapter ends, the Master turns again to the people. The ominous nature of the present position, and the trouble in store for all who want to be loyal and true, these things are plain to Him: He marvels that so few have eyes to read the signs of the times. “ Ye see a cloud rise out of the west.” Amos too had seen those clouds coming up and pouring their contents on the Judean ridge, “ Seek Him that calleth for the waters of the sea and poureth them out upon the face of the earth.” And there were weather prophets who could be speedy and dogmatic enough

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xii.
49-59.

—“Straightway ye say”—in the interpretation of such a phenomenon. “Ye see the south wind blow”—the wind that came out of the desert; again there were popular weather prophets who could read the signs and not make serious mistakes. But no one seemed to have an eye for moral and spiritual omens, or to read such signs as, let us say, the Baptist and his ministry, or Christ’s own words and works. Possibly the meaning of v. 57, “*Why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?*”—is that even without such special aids and ministries they might have had conscience enough within them to guide them in the true path. Vv. 58, 59, are given in a different setting in St Matthew¹ and are somewhat difficult here to relate to the argument. Perhaps it is best to take them, with Dr A. B. Bruce, as a scene from ordinary life to illustrate a similar situation in the moral world. We see the man who has got into a scrape going before the magistrate to confront the man who has a complaint against him. They meet on the road. He sees the God-given chance of making up to him and coming to a settlement. Otherwise he sees the dreary sequence of being dragged before the judge, and then handed over to the jailer, and staying in his cell till he has paid for his fault to the uttermost. In short, it pays to settle up before judgment, not after. If men would but use their eyes, they would see that judgment is coming—coming more plainly than rain from the west or heat from the south! And if only they would consult their own common

¹ v. 25 f.

Fire on Earth and Signs in the Sky

sense, they would do what they could to avert it **Luke xii.** by their repentance! But men who could not see **49-59.** the imminence of judgment were not likely to see the urgency of opportunity.

Dora Greenwell says that "two principles are at work within Christianity—twin-existent, of which as yet travailing and in haste to be delivered, she crieth out—the desire for unity and the passionate love for truth." It is a true saying; and different moments of Christian experience, different ages of Church history, might illustrate the one aspect or the other of the twin-burden of our faith. In this paragraph of the Master's teaching the passionate love for truth is uppermost: He will let that holy fire wage its own strife with evil. And He is right, for it is only as the fire consumes error and evil and all "the dross of base desire," that true unity can be made possible and permanent. The Travail
of the Faith

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

O Thou Who camest from above,
The pure celestial fire to impart,
Kindle a flame of sacred love
On the mean altar of my heart.

There let it for Thy glory burn
With inextinguishable blaze,
And trembling to its source return
In humble prayer, and fervent praise.

Charles Wesley

LII

THE SHADOW OF DOOM

"There were present at that season some that told Him of the Galilæans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answering said unto them, Suppose ye that these Galilæans were sinners above all the Galilæans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. Or those eighteen, upon whom the tower in Siloam fell, and slew them, think ye that they were sinners above all men that dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish. He spake also this parable; A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: And if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down."—LUKE xiii. 1-9.

Luke xiii.
1-9.

DOOM was in the air when the words at the close of chapter xii. were spoken: the doom that was in the air had crept into the message. Doom is still in the air when this chapter opens. There are occasions when all things seem ominous.

"Against the Capitol I met a lion,
Who glared upon me, and went surly by,
Without annoying me: and there were drawn
Upon a heap a hundred ghostly women,
Transformed with their fear; who swore they saw
Men all in fire walk up and down the streets.

The Shadow of Doom

And yesterday the bird of night did sit
Even at noon-day upon the market-place,
Hooting and shrieking. When these prodigies
Do so conjointly meet, let not men say,
'These are their reasons; they are natural';
For, I believe, they are portentous things
Unto the climate that they point upon."

Luke xiii.
1-9.

And here, if doom was in the air, and doom was in the message of Christ, there were some whose very conversation deepened the general impression of doom as they "told Him of the Galileans, whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices." The Master had spoken (xii. 56) of reading the heavens and discerning the signs of the sky: here was a portent for Him to interpret. Was this a special judgment for special sin, the haste of the Divine indignation upon some outstanding iniquity that was too evil to be kept waiting for the general judgment?

There is no other historical record of the incident about which our Lord was questioned, though it may have been the cause, or one of the causes of the estrangement between Pilate and Herod which is recorded later (xxiii. 12) in this very Gospel. Perhaps the Galileans, up in Jerusalem for one of the great feasts, had indulged in some fanatical act of rebellion, and Pilate, whose difficult task was that of keeping order, had acted mercilessly and swiftly. Our Lord refused to be drawn into a discussion of the special case. He was more anxious to get His hearers to think of themselves than to read the riddle of other people's misfortunes. He was so anxious to get His hearers to think of them-

Special Case
and General
Principle.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiii. 1-9. selves and of the case of their own nation that He added an instance of His own, another calamity apparently fresh in men's minds but not elsewhere recorded—the case of the eighteen, upon whom the Tower in Siloam fell and slew them. Some have thought they may have been working at one of Pilate's aqueducts. The lesson of that He applied in the same way. There was to be no hasty judgment that these men were sinners above their neighbours. There was no need to waste time in fitting isolated cases into the general scheme of the Divine Government. Bigger things were rushing on, and would soon be here unless they were averted by a national repentance—not the fall of a tower but the crash of a state, not the doom of a few but the doom of the whole Jewish race. Dr Plummer makes a wise and suggestive comment upon the difference between personal and national calamity. “The suffering of a whole nation is more likely to be produced by the sin of the nation than the suffering of an individual by the sin of the individual.” The individual is at the mercy of many waves of tendency : he may, of course, suffer for his own fault : he may be made to suffer through the sin or carelessness of others. But a nation is so broad-based that its fall is not easily brought about from without ; it is questionable whether there is in history any case of the fall of a nation in which antecedent moral causes may not be traced, working from within. But be that as it may, the sense of Israel's impending doom was by this time deep in our Lord's mind, and He turned it into a parable.

The Shadow of Doom

Some of the commentators have puzzled over our Lord's choice here of the fig-tree to be a symbol. Luke xiii. 1-9.

The old and hallowed symbol of Israel was not the fig-tree but the vine: "Thou hast brought a vine out of Egypt. . . . Return, we beseech Thee, O God of hosts: look down from heaven and behold, and visit this vine." It was a golden vine that adorned the Temple Gate, seeming ever to remind Israel of her privilege and to call forth her national pride. Can there be a gentle rebuke in the substitution here of the fig-tree? Could it be that Israel was only a fig-tree planted in a corner of God's vast vineyard, and with no prescriptive right to a monopoly of His favour? Nations, churches, men—we are all apt to fancy ourselves the centre of the stage. We need occasionally to have our pride humbled and to be reminded that the stage and the plan are larger than our imaginings.

1. There are at least three things in this parable. The first is the *patience of God*. The owner said unto the dresser of the vineyard, "Behold, these three years I come"—the tense means "I keep coming"—"seeking fruit on this fig-tree." The three years need not imply any reference to our Lord's Ministry: it is a parable of deliberation and delay, a hint of God's long patience with His fruitless people. St Paul has some new names for God which were not given Him in the older time. One of these is "the God of Patience."¹ It conveys great comfort, and yet it holds within it a rebuke more searching than any name of judgment or terror

The God of
Patience.

¹ Rom. xv. 5.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiii. 1-9. could convey. To examine carefully our own lives is to see a fresh revelation of the God of patience. "The central fact of human life," Dr John Oman says, "is God's patience." He has come so often—met us on our Sundays, met us at our Communions, searched us, invited us, helped us so repeatedly by His word and Spirit. And what has He found? We hang our heads when we answer Him.

The Urgent
God.

2. Yet there is a grave danger in allowing ourselves to think that God is all patience. We do not know the God of our faith and worship unless we have learned to find Him in the moral realities of life. So the second thing in the parable is the *impatience of God*. "Behold, these three years do I keep coming seeking fruit on this fig-tree and find none: cut it down: why cumbereth it the ground?" There are two grounds of impatience here. The first is the obvious one—fruitlessness. The second one is scarcely brought out in our English translation: its import might be rendered, "Why, in addition," i.e. in addition to its mere blank fruitlessness, "does it cumber," or sterilize, "the ground?" The point is that it is not merely fruitless in itself: it is taking up space which might more profitably be given to something else. Can this be a hint of God's larger purpose—to pass from the Jews to the Gentiles? His love is patient, but it is also eager and urgent, and if it is unrequited, it will, it must, pass on.

Has He no right to be impatient? Isaiah felt within his passionate soul a deep sympathy with the urgent passion of God's heart. And using the

The Shadow of Doom

older parable of the vineyard, he cried in God's name,¹ "Now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt Me and My vineyard. What could have been done more to My vineyard that I have not done in it? Wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" And the men of Jerusalem, and the inhabitants of Judah, if they judged with an honest judgment, knew that their God was right. Not less surely, and even more convincingly, the voice of God, which had sometimes thus spoken through His servants, spoke now through His Son. Man is not satisfied with unproductive labour: why should God be satisfied? He is not satisfied and He has ways of showing it—the great historical crises when He purges His world with the bitter fire of judgment and starts afresh. Such a crisis was at hand for Israel. Such a crisis has come again and again, when power and privilege pass away from those who have abused them, and wasted opportunities pass to other hands.

3. Yet the last thing exhibited here is not the Divine impatience but *God's lingering and most patient grace*. It has been remarked that while our Lord has parables of judgment, there is no parable of judgment which is not at some point a parable of grace. That is true of this parable at least. Who taught this vine-dresser this secret of sweet intercession? He answering said to the indignant owner, "Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit"—that

God's
Patience
again.

¹ Is. v. 3.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiii.
1-9.

clause is not finished, its happy conclusion goes without saying, or is a hope so faint that it fades with the speaking—"and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down." Is this vine-dresser Christ Himself, and does this turn of the parable give a hint of His own secret passionate prayers that the nation which He loved might be given a longer space for repentance? That might not be a misinterpretation: at any rate, the grace is in the parable, because the grace was in the Saviour, and the Saviour was of God's sending. Outside of Holy Scripture has this lingering note in the Divine Love ever been more perfectly expressed than in Christina Rossetti's poem, "Despised and Rejected"?

"All night long that Voice spake urgently,
'Open to Me.'
Still harping in mine ears;
'Rise, let Me in.'
Pleading with tears:
'Open to Me, that I may come to thee' . . .
So till the break of day:
Then died away
That Voice, in silence as of sorrow;
Then footsteps echoing like a sigh
Passed me by,
Lingering footsteps slow to pass.
On the morrow
I saw upon the grass
Each footprint marked in blood and on my door
The mark of blood for evermore."

Lingering footsteps slow to pass! We can hear them in this parable, as clearly as we can hear the nearing thunders of judgment.

The Day of
Grace.

Souls used to be greatly puzzled by difficulties

The Shadow of Doom

about the Day of Grace and about the line dividing Luke xiii. God's patience from His wrath. Such difficulties ^{1-9.} centre round such passages as this parable. It is important to remember that a parable is a parable, phrased in pictorial speech. In the reality of God's dealings there is nothing capricious or arbitrary: the truth at which the parable hints lies deep in the nature of things. There is no limit to God's love and patience: yet there may be a limit to the human power of response, a point beyond which even God's labour is wasted labour. The psychology and the ethics of to-day, though they do not use Scriptural language, are as emphatic as the Scriptures in enforcing the critical and urgent importance of the hours before character sets and habits are fixed. The Church must not be behind mental and moral science in preaching the value of *Now*. Her Lord is with her in the task. And our souls shall be ashamed in the day of His appearing if they have not returned an eager response to His urgent love.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

If Thou hadst not
 Been stern to me,
 But left me free,
I had forgot
 Myself and Thee.

For sin's so sweet
 As minds ill-bent
 Rarely repent
Until they meet
 Their punishment.—*Ben Jonson*

LIII

MORE HEALING ON THE SABBATH

“And He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the sabbath. And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years, and was bowed together, and could in no wise lift up herself. And when Jesus saw her, he called her to Him, and said unto her, Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity. And He laid His hands on her: and immediately she was made straight, and glorified God. And the ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus had healed on the sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work: in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the sabbath day. The Lord then answered him, and said, Thou hypocrite, doth not each one of you on the sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall, and lead him away to watering? And ought not this woman, being a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day? And when He had said these things, all his adversaries were ashamed: and all the people rejoiced for all the glorious things that were done by Him. . . . And it came to pass, as He went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the sabbath day, that they watched Him. And, behold, there was a certain man before Him which had the dropsy. And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the sabbath day? And they held their peace. And He took him, and healed him, and let him go; And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the sabbath day? And they could not answer Him again to these things.”—LUKE xiii. 10-17, xiv. 1-6.

More Healing on the Sabbath

WE may take these two passages together for more ^{Luke xiii.} reasons than one. They are both further illustra- ^{10-17,} tions of our Lord's ministry of healing. They both ^{xiv. 1-6.} show the Sabbath controversy once more breaking out round about His path. There is also this more slender thread of connection that in each incident our Lord reminds His hearers of what a man would do for his beast on the Sabbath day—with the implication of the "how much more" regarding his duty to his fellow-man. It will be best to take each incident by itself, and then try to fuse them together into their common message of the Saviour's grace.

1. It is comforting to turn from the severity of ^{A Daughter} the previous paragraphs with their stern note of ^{of Abraham} warning, to study the case of the woman with the "spirit of infirmity," reminding ourselves by means of it of the vast pity which even through His most needed warnings never left the heart of Christ. The place where the synagogue was situated is not given. The story is peculiar to St Luke, and the details are very vivid: it is a real slice of life, including the ruler of the synagogue with his pompous platitudes, and the people with their naïve and happy admiration. "He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath"—the last time we find Him in this environment. "And, behold, there was a woman which had a spirit of infirmity eighteen years." Many of the Jews believed that certain diseases were due to evil spirits. Are we to suppose that our Lord endorses that view when He speaks a moment later of this "daughter of Abraham, whom Satan hath bound?" Perhaps the only thing we can

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiii.
10-17,
xiv. 1-6.

dogmatise about is the danger of reading too much into possibly pictorial phrases. Christ was moved by the pathos of her case. "She was bowed together and could in no wise lift up herself." The Greek adverbial phrase here is also that employed in a very familiar verse of Hebrews (vii. 25), "He is able to save them *to the uttermost* that come unto God by Him." The phrase before us now represents the uttermost of bondage: the phrase in Hebrews reveals the uttermost of power. "And when Jesus saw her, He called her to Him": it must have been a thrilling surprise for her—there is no indication of her having approached Him or appealed to Him, though she may have had her own desires and hopes. And He said, "Woman, thou art loosed from thine infirmity": the verb is in the perfect tense, giving a touch of meaning which Dr A. B. Bruce renders perfectly by saying that it was "as good as done." "And He laid His hands on her"—what work those hands had already accomplished, cleansing the foul, strengthening the weak, blessing and breaking the bread, caressing the children, and yet all that mankind could do with them was to nail them to a cross! "And immediately"—the habit of nerves and muscles for eighteen years broken in an instant by that mighty, tender touch!—"immediately she was made straight, and glorified God." Our scholars say that the word rendered "made straight" was the technical medical word for putting right "abnormal or dislocated parts." The Nazareth programme had been "to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives . . . to set at

More Healing on the Sabbath

liberty them that are bruised." Once more this Scripture was fulfilled in men's ears.

Luke xiii.

10-17,

xiv. 1-6.

Bonds
broken.

The happy and tender incident was as a match to re-kindle the flames of the Sabbath controversy. Quite as remarkable as the lack of moral indignation in some souls is the extreme irascibility of others: if only the indifferentists and the fanatics could be blended into some gracious average! "The ruler of the synagogue answered with indignation, because that Jesus healed on the Sabbath day, and said unto the people, There are six days in which men ought to work"—excellent doctrine if he had not so grievously misapplied it here, talking *to* the people, but talking *at* the Master!—"in them therefore come and be healed, and not on the Sabbath day." But He who was Truth and Love in one could not let this distortion of the truth pass unchecked. "Ye hypocrites," He said—the right reading here is plural: doubtless He was addressing not the ruler alone but others of a like spirit aiding and abetting him, the inner ring of synagogue orthodoxy—"doth not each one of you on the Sabbath loose his ox or his ass from the stall and lead him away to watering?" Rabbinic law is said to have so refined the Sabbath precept as to permit the beast being taken to the water but not the water being carried to the beast. Not one of them would see with disapproval the loosening of that halter: how much more ought they to rejoice when this bond, even on the Sabbath day, fell from the life of this "daughter of Abraham!" That name, so dignified and tender, was itself a

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiii.
10-17,
xiv. 1-6.

crown of honour set by Christ upon the woman's head : let her be allowed to stand upright and wear it ! Verse 17 is extraordinarily pictorial in its reflection of the whole scene. "As He was saying these things"—the verb is in the present participle : His words began to do their work ere he had finished saying them—"all His adversaries were ashamed and all the people rejoiced." We see the gloomy, sulky faces on the one side, the happy excitement on the other : yet neither the discomfiture of His enemies nor the applause of His admirers can make us forget the quiet intensity of gratitude which must have filled the woman's heart, as she stood upright after so many years of weary bondage.

A Fruitful
Feast.

2. We turn to the other incident, also peculiar to St Luke. It is briefly told, but it is a very important event were it only because it was the beginning of so much. It happened at a feast in a Pharisee's house (xiv. 1-6). Out of that came the teaching about places at feasts and how to make the ideal feast (7-14) : and out of that again came the parable of God's great feast (15-24). It was, then, a fruitful moment when our Lord, on that Sabbath day, turned His steps towards this Pharisee's house to eat bread. Strict as were the traditions regarding the keeping of the Sabbath, they did not forbid feasting, though the meats must be cold. If the Pharisee of that house had ears to hear, and a heart to hunger, he got that day more than he gave.

Evil Eye and
Healing
Hand.

It was one of the hardships of our Lord's earthly life that He had so often to move and act amid

More Healing on the Sabbath

sinister eyes which followed Him with malicious intent, watching to see Him trip. "They watched Him." We have seen that gaze before (vi. 7). We shall see it again (xx. 20). Here indeed is the "evil eye," so ugly that one might be pardoned for calling it diabolical: one might indeed almost be pardoned for attributing to it diabolical power—it can sometimes have so unnerving an effect upon its victim. This time they saw something to repay them for their watching. "Behold"—there is a kind of hint of surprise in the word: is it a reflection of the general surprise as those present realised that something was going to happen?—"there was a certain man in front of Him, who was dropsical"—again we have one of St Luke's technical medical terms, the only mention of this disease among the many cases our Lord dealt with. Does the strong phrase "in front of Him" imply that the man had deliberately planted himself there in order to attract the eye of Jesus? It is conceivable: he does not seem to have belonged to the household or to have been an invited guest, for when Christ had healed him, He let him depart. It was the Sabbath, and the Master this time did not wait for the challenge of His enemies which He knew would come. He answered their unspoken thoughts. He carried war into their own camp. "Jesus answering, spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day?" Tradition might say, No: but older, deeper instincts said, Yes. And steering for safety "between the Scylla and Charybdis of Aye and No" they deemed

Luke xiii.
10-17,
xiv. 1-6.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiii.
10-17,
xiv. 1-6.

it wise to be silent. And Jesus took him—it means “took hold of him,” once more that cleansing, comforting, corrective *touch*—and healed him, and dismissed him. The argument with which our Lord supported His action was once more that of the ass or ox—or, according to some MSS here, the argument of a child or an ox, “which of you shall have a son, or even an ox, fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath Day?” They could not answer Him, and their hearts must have been as hard as the nether millstone if they did not feel that the Holy Day had been made holier still by a deed of mercy.

Putting both incidents together we get a twofold glimpse into the mind and heart of the Saviour.

The Boon of
the Sabbath.

(a) We see His sense of *the positive beneficence* which He reckoned in harmony with the *Sabbath law*. We have had occasion to note more than once that He was never satisfied with a negative: He always wanted to reach the positive and affirmative. And in His view of the Sabbath He was true to His general principle. Those had missed the glory and the blessedness of the Divine intention in regard to this matter who merely surrounded the day with a hedge of thou-shalt-not's, and refused to let love have an outlet. We can only gather by inference what Christ's line of action would have been in regard to the day of rest, had He lived in a civilisation like our own, in which that day is too habitually desecrated or ignored. He lived in an environment where the boon of the Sabbath was turned into a burden, and He had to plead for a reasonable and

More Healing on the Sabbath

gracious freedom. But we can guess that if our ^{Luke xiii.} environment had been His, He would have sought ^{10-17,} to keep the day for the blessing and helping of ^{xiv. 1-6} humanity in the fullest possible way: in man's highest interests He would have the day kept free from the burden of toil as much as from the burden of legal restriction. Lord Shaw of Dunfermline has written thus of his own experience¹, "I can truly say that for over thirty years of my life there was not one week-end on which I could not have pleaded exhaustion and left work over for Sunday. And I am also as truly certain of this, that if I had yielded to that temptation I should long ago have been in my grave. The really laborious man cannot afford to work on Sunday. Often and often have I seen times when the strain of nerve and battle was so great that one strove through it and towards the Sabbath calm with a certain passionate exaltation of mind." Ought not we on this day to be loosed from our bonds?

(b) These new glimpses of the healing Ministry ^{He helped} once more reveal to us the *compassion of the heart* ^{me.} *of the Saviour*. This is displayed equally in the two incidents; but some of us will confess to a special sympathy with that bowed, twisted woman, loaded so long with the burden of her infirmity—she is so like ourselves! The Saviour who helped her is the Saviour we need—One whose spirit can help our infirmities, One whose strength is made perfect in weakness. Dr T. R. Glover, in his book on the *Conflict of Religions in the Roman Empire*,

¹ *Letters to Isabel*, p. 65 f.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiii.
10-17,
xiv. 1-6.

has dwelt on the wonder of Christian happiness in the early days. Its secret lay in the fact which made the difference between Stoic and Christian: "the Stoic knew nothing of such an experience as the Christian summed up as 'the grace of God,' 'grace sufficient,' and 'grace abounding.' It is hard to think of these familiar phrases being new and strange, the coining of Paul to express what no man had said before." Yet Paul could speak such a message because His Master had uttered it first, not in word only but in deed—in His life and in His death and in His whole Ministry to men. Two instances out of the great record of His helpfulness are open before us: may He number us also among those who can say, "I was brought low and He helped me!"

FOR MEDITATION AND THANKSGIVING

As I had forsaken all the priests, so I left the separate preachers also, and those called the most experienced people. For I saw there was none among them all that could speak to my condition. And when all my hopes in them and in all men was gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could tell what to do, then, O then, I heard a voice which said, "There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition." And when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy.

George Fox

LIV

THE GROWTH OF THE KINGDOM

“Then said He, Unto what is the kingdom of God like? and whereunto shall I resemble it? It is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and cast into his garden; and it grew, and waxed a great tree; and the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it. And again He said, Whereunto shall I liken the kingdom of God? It is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened.”—LUKE xiii. 18-21.

WHAT had our Lord been about to say when He Luke xiii. interrupted Himself to attend to the case of the 18-21. woman with the spirit of infirmity? Had He been about to utter the two parables which we are studying now? For St Luke starts this paragraph with a point of time: “*then* said He.” The sequence does not seem to grow naturally out of the healing of the woman or out of the people’s joy: it seems more reasonable to treat that incident as a parenthesis and to take this “then” back to verse 10, “He was teaching in one of the synagogues on the Sabbath.” Dr A. B. Bruce points out that this is the only mention of parables as ingredients in synagogue addresses; most of the parables were in open-air talks.

If these two parables were indeed spoken in a synagogue, then our Lord, in the very act of

The Master's
 Quiet
 Method

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiii.
18-21. delivering them, was Himself an illustration of the truth embodied in them, the quiet, gradual, cumulative growth of the Kingdom. Nothing could be more unpretentious than this method of briefly addressing a small congregation in a quiet meeting place. There was no pomp of power, no machinery of compulsion, no outward and visible emblem of authority. He trusted the spoken word, the personal influence, the seed sown and left in the ground to grow. We do not know in how many Palestinian synagogues He spoke—several, at least. But His apostles and messengers were to make a wide and frequent use, after He was gone, of the same approach to the people. And they, too, had no pomp of power to back them up, no machinery of compulsion to persuade men against their wills, no outward and visible emblems of authority; they, too, had to trust the spoken word, the personal influence, reinforced as it was by One Who was working with them; they, too, had to leave the seed in the ground and let it grow, the leaven in the meal and let it work. George Herbert's words, "God calleth preaching folly," are scarcely true, for in the familiar text about "the foolishness of preaching" the folly is rather in the theme of the preaching, the Cross, than in the act of preaching itself. Yet from the standpoint of the kingdoms of this world the method of preaching may well seem foolishly quiet and foolishly weak, in proportion to the vast and far-reaching ends which it is desired to attain. But the Master trusted it for His own work and for that of His disciples, knowing that the influence of the

The Growth of the Kingdom

message, though unsensational, would be cumulative **Luke xiii.** and reproductive. Occasionally the power of the **18-21.** spoken word flashes out into prominence: instead of being like seed or leaven, it becomes like a fire, or like the hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces, as when Savonarola from his pulpit in Florence changed the face of a great and wicked city. But most of the time the work of the spoken word goes on quietly, like the Master's own work in the synagogues of Palestine: its quietness is made up for by its steadiness: the world does not know how much it is receiving Sunday by Sunday from this source, of moral sanity, of intellectual guidance, of spiritual good cheer. And if this method were given over, the Kingdom of God would be hard put to it to find a substitute.

The special point of both parables is the amazing contrast between the Christian beginnings, so small and obscure, and the Christian climax, which, coming gently, nevertheless comes surely.

First, we have the lesson in the grain of mustard seed. "Small as a mustard seed" was a proverb among the Jews. The Kingdom "is like a grain of mustard seed, which a man took and cast into his garden"—a more special word than the "earth" or "field" of the other evangelists: can there be an allusion to the land and people which had in a peculiar sense been God's own? "And it grew and waxed a great tree." We may leave the scholars and antiquarians to wrangle over this possibility and to decide whether the allusion was to the *salvadora persica* which grew to twenty-five feet, or the *sinapis*

The Seed and
the Tree.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiii. 18-21. *nigra* which only grew to twelve. The point is the amazing contrast between the tiny beginning and the big result—a result not merely to be stated in terms of magnitude but of sheltering power, “the fowls of the air lodged in the branches of it.” A tree was an old symbol of the majesty and beauty of God’s Kingdom. In Ezekiel’s vision¹ the Assyrian Empire was like a cedar of Lebanon. “All the fowls of heaven made their nest in his boughs . . . and under his shadow dwelt all great nations.” And Nebuchadnezzar saw his own might and glory in a like picture: a tree that “grew, and was strong, and the height thereof reached unto heaven and the sight thereof to the end of all the earth . . . the fowls of the heaven dwelt in the boughs thereof and all flesh was fed of it.” The Master is more modest in His dream: even *salvadora persica* cannot compete with the monarchs of the forest. The tree of His planting takes a quiet place among the living forces of history, but it will stand when some cedars fall.

The Master must have looked at the living, growing things and delighted in them, before He took them as parables of His Kingdom. Let us also look at them and be made wise.

“I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree.
A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth’s sweet flowing breast;
A tree that looks at God all day,
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;

¹ Ezek. xxxi. 6; Dan. iv. 10.

The Growth of the Kingdom

A tree that may in summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair ;
Upon whose bosom snow has lain,
Who intimately lives with rain."

Luke xiii.
18-21.

And Joyce Kilmer, the American soldier-poet, who wrote these lines, added,

" Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree."

Of all the trees God ever planted, His Kingdom, with its sheltering arms, with its leaves for the healing of the nations, is the greatest, the loveliest, and the best. Because it lives, all fair things live under its shadow. If it were cut down the world would be a wilderness.

Once more, in the parable of the leaven, we see the picture of a small beginning and a great result. The Kingdom is "like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal." Dr Glover¹ sets this beside the women grinding at the mill, and the heating of the oven with grass for fuel. among the reflections of life as Jesus saw it in His mother's house. While the oven is being heated "the leaven is at work in the meal where the woman hid it, and her Son sits by and watches the heaving, panting mass—the bubbles rising and bursting, the fall of the level, and the rising of other bubbles to burst in their turn—all bubbles! Later on, the picture came back to Him : it was like the Kingdom of God : 'all bubbles!' said the disappointed, but He saw more clearly. The bubbles are broken by

The Leaven
and the
Meal.

¹ *The Jesus of History*, p. 27.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiii. the force of the active life at work beneath—life,
18-21. not death is the story.” How small the leaven looks compared with the dull, dead mass of meal into which it is thrust! Yet how it spreads through all, and changes all!—“the whole was leavened.” It is another aspect of that infinite and many-sided surprise, the Kingdom of God.

God's Double Method. There is a great contrast between such views of the Kingdom—views that could be represented by the growth of the seed and the spread of the leaven—and the popular conception of that Kingdom as meaning the breaking of the oppressor's yoke and a great external deliverance. How unworldly He was! and His Kingdom was truly not of this world from the very manner of its inception—

“They all were looking for a King
To slay their foes and lift them high:
Thou cam'st, a little Baby thing,
That made a woman cry,”

through its method of growth and progress, to that ultimate climax still to be when the meek shall inherit the earth. More puzzling perhaps is the remoteness of such conceptions from the more apocalyptic, catastrophic side of our Lord's own teaching. Yet experience has its own commentary on both sides of the truth. History is for the most part evolutionary—an ordered progress, in which freedom “slowly broadens down from precedent to precedent,” in which institutions grow and ideas bear fruit in their season. Yet occasionally the earth is rent by revolutionary forces; the lava

The Growth of the Kingdom

flows ; stars fall from their places, and all things **Luke xiii.** heave and whirl. The gentle way is God's usual **18-21.** way--the way of the growing seed and spreading leaven ; yet He reserves His right to take His strange way sometimes "when He ariseth to shake terribly the earth." The Apostle James bound the two thoughts into one sequence when he said : "Behold the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and the latter rain. Be ye also patient ; stablish your hearts ; for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh."

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

The aim that all His members must set before themselves may be quite simply stated thus : *World-wide witness* to the Lord. . . . We aim immediately at the planting of Church life and order in all lands, at the formation of Churches, not only the conversion of individuals. .

Lambeth Conference Report, 1920

LV

THE STRAIT GATE

“And He went through the cities and villages, teaching, and journeying toward Jerusalem. Then said one unto Him, Lord, are there few that be saved? And He said unto them, Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open unto us; and He shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are: Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets. But He shall say, I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart from Me, all ye workers of iniquity. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves thrust out. And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God. And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.”—LUKE xiii. 22-30.

Luke xiii. 22-30. It is as if the Evangelist wished to remind us at intervals that our Lord was on His last, fateful journey. As far back as ix. 51, he has told us that the Master “stedfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.” Here again he pauses to give us a glimpse of the same journey: “He went through the cities and villages, teaching and journeying toward Jerusalem.” Farther on in xvii. 11, we find Him passing through Samaria and Galilee, yet He

The Strait Gate

is going to Jerusalem. Whether all this is strictly Luke xiii. chronological or not we do not know, but having 22-30. once seen that stedfast look in the Master's eyes, the Evangelist seems unable to forget it: he reminds himself and us that through many wanderings, on many errands, Christ was always tending to one goal.

If the stedfast, dedicated Christ was the Lord of the pilgrims, He was also their pattern, and it is characteristic of His zeal that He should give His hearers a lesson in zeal. It arose out of a casual question. We have already noticed how often an unexpected incident or a chance interruption unlocked the treasures of His thought. "Then said one unto Him, Lord, are there few that be saved?" The human mind has an amazing tendency to ride off upon side issues, especially if it is in the mood to ignore central truths or urgent duties. To turn one's back entirely upon truth or duty would not be seemly, but there are little by-paths up one of which it may be quite polite to wander! Every messenger of God who has wrestled with men knows their tendency to raise some curious question as a smoke-screen between their souls and the truth: the problem of Cain's wife or almost anything will serve. Mind and heart are nimbly ready for almost anything except the urgent task of entering in. There is a famous story of Jean Jacques Rousseau—that when he was a lad he was somewhat perturbed about the question of his own salvation or damnation. He was amusing himself by throwing stones at trees. "He resolved," Lord Morley says, "to test his doom

Central
Truths and
Side Issues

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiii.
22-30.

by throwing a stone at a particular tree ; if he hit, then salvation ; if he missed, then perdition. With a trembling hand and beating heart, he threw ; as he had chosen a large tree and was careful not to place himself too far away, all was well." So one soul may start guessing as to the proportions between saved and lost : another may start gambling with his own fate ; but to the natural man either device, or indeed almost anything that can be conceived, is easier than giving diligence to make one's calling and election sure. One fancies that the man who put this question to our Lord must have been in this trifling mood. " Are there few that be saved ? " —it was a fine question for an argument, playing near the edge of tremendous issues without committing oneself to anything.

Urgent
Opportunity.

The Master, however, admits of no evasion in any soul which is face to face with Him. And His reply to this man was as tremendous in its import as it was abrupt in its expression. " Agonise to enter in at the narrow gate." That word *agonise* is worth dwelling upon. Inevitably it makes us think of the agony in the garden. It brings to our remembrance sad Gethsemane. Or it carries us away on another line of thought to Paul's athlete, agonising for the mastery in the games, panting, straining, putting his very all of skill and strength into the struggle for a corruptible crown. One reason why the Puritans still keep their fascination for a few elect souls in modern days, why a Bunyan, a Boston, an Owen still find readers, is that, whatever were their defects or limitations, they had this note

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of moral and spiritual intensity. They took their **Luke xiii.** spiritual opportunities seriously. They were sus- **22-30.** picious of themselves and severe with themselves. They searched their own hearts deeply and lived as men who should give account—in short, they *agonised*. And we, who have too much forgotten that secret, are shallow and colourless by comparison. Once more, as in xii. 35 f., the lesson is driven home with a compressed edition of the parable of the ten virgins. “Many, I say unto you, will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. When once the Master of the house is risen up, and hath shut to the door, and ye begin to stand without, and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us . . . He shall answer and say unto you, I know you not whence ye are.” “The right use of opportunity,” Newman says, “is the beginning, and middle, and end of success.” Already in this Gospel (xi. 5-9) we have seen a soul knocking at the door, and knocking importunately, and getting an answer. That must be the right use of opportunity—to feel the need and to seize the hour. This on the other hand must be the wrong use, the too-late use, of opportunity, the cry not of need but of chagrin, the knocking of those who had the opportunity and cast it away and are now envious of the splendours from which they have exiled themselves. We must not let the pictorial nature of the language hide from us how morally and intensely true is the situation here depicted. The student who has neglected his hours of study and then knocked in vain at the doors of his degree: the selfish heart that has shut love out

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiii. 22-30. and then vainly craved the love without which life is poor: the man wrapped in affairs who meant to be kind to his needy friend and then wakened to realise that his friend was gone beyond his help—these are all instances of the kind of situation which arises continually in the moral world when human beings trifle with their opportunities. It is not surprising then, but very likely, that such tragedies may happen even in the deepest affairs of the soul. The tide, once at the flood, may be lost. The door once open may be locked and barred. And the voices that might have been voices of welcome may say

“Too late, too late! Ye cannot enter now.”

Near and yet Far.

The warning is intensified by the solemn and haunting words which follow, where the Master pictures the pleading of the self-exiled souls whose knocking has been in vain. “Then shall ye begin to say, We have eaten and drunk in Thy presence.” Was Simon, the Pharisee of chapter vii., within sound of this warning? Or the nameless Pharisee of chapter xi., who besought Jesus to dine with him, and in whose house He sat down to meat? Or the Pharisee of chapter xiv., with whom He ate bread, when they watched Him to see whether He would heal on the Sabbath Day? Were these and such as these inside or outside the Kingdom when their day was done? Was it possible to have Christ at the table and yet not to have Him in the heart? “Then shall ye begin to say . . . Thou hast taught in our streets,” as if it would avail to have been

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a citizen of Nazareth, or Capernaum, or Jerusalem **Luke xiii.**
in the days of Christ's Ministry, though His presence **22-30.**
had never been welcomed nor His word obeyed!
These things give point to that great imperative,
Agonise. There is a path to destruction even from
the streets where the church bells ring.

The words that follow are scarcely in need of **From East
and West**
comment: their best comment is our trembling
prayer that they be not true of us. "He shall say,
I tell you, I know you not whence ye are; depart
from Me, all ye workers of iniquity. There"—and
that word is no mere particle, it is the Greek adverb
of place emphatic at the beginning of the sentence—
there! on the very threshold of the Kingdom, which
all Jews expected proudly and triumphantly to
cross—"there shall be weeping and gnashing of
teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and
Jacob, and all the prophets, in the Kingdom of God,
and you yourselves thrust out." There had been
old dreams of visions and opportunities for peoples
and kindreds far beyond Israel. The "Evangelical
prophet" had been specially rich in these¹: "that
they may know from the rising of the sun and from
the west that there is none beside Me"; "behold
these shall come from far, and lo, these from the
north and from the west." The music of such
promises seemed to haunt the Master's heart till it
almost drowned the thunders of judgment: "They
shall come from the east, and from the west, and
from the north, and from the south, and shall sit
down in the Kingdom of God." Yet through all

¹ Is. xlv. 6; xlix. 12.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiii.
22-30.

the music of promise He would have the thunder of judgment heard by careless hearts : He would have them understand how the insider may make himself an outsider by his carelessness, while the outsider becomes by his faith and zeal an insider, and a child of faithful Abraham. So “there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.”

The Violent
take it by
Force.

Agonise ! Bunyan must have had the message of such a passage as this in his mind when he wrote his pen-picture of the stately palace, beautiful to behold, the many men in armour who kept the door and made entry difficult, the man of a very stout countenance, who defied them all. “So, after he had received and given many wounds to those that attempted to keep him out, he cut his way through them all, and pressed forward into the palace ; at which there was a pleasant voice heard from those that were within, saying :

“ ‘ Come in, come in ;
Eternal glory thou shalt win.’

So he went in and was clothed with such garments as they. Then Christian smiled, and said, ‘ I think verily I know the meaning of this.’ ” We, too, know the meaning of it—we who have heard the Master say, “ Agonise.”

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

“ Could I but hear my Saviour say—
‘ I know thy patience and thy love,
How thou hast held the narrow way,

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For my sake laboured night and day, Luke xiii.

And watched, and striven with them that strove, ^{22-30.}
And still hast borne and didst not faint,'

Oh, this would be reward indeed.

Press forward then without complaint:

Labour and love—and such shall be thy meed."

Anne Brontë

LVI

SEVERITY AND TENDER MERCY

“The same day there came certain of the Pharisees, saying unto Him, Get Thee out, and depart hence : for Herod will kill Thee. And He said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to day and to morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. Nevertheless I must walk to day, and to morrow, and the day following : for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem. O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee ; how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not ! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate : and verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord.”
—LUKE xiii. 31-35.

LUKE xiii. 31-35. ST PAUL in one of his epistles bids his readers behold the goodness and the severity of God. The two themes are not inconsistent : they are complementary. And no one who studies the Master's life and work can long be remote from either side of the case. The two sides alternate in the message, as they alternate in experience and in history. Here they are compactly presented. He glances at Herod : behold, what severity ! He turns to Jerusalem : behold, what lingering tenderness !

1. “The same day”—it must have been some-

Severity and Tender Mercy

where in Herod's dominions, though we are not Luke xiii. told where—"there came certain of the Pharisees, 31-35. saying unto Him, Get Thee out, and depart hence; for Herod would fain kill Thee." It is possible ^{An Attempt at Expulsion.} that this was the sudden artillery of a thunder-cloud which had been visible for a while. We are told in St Mark (iii. 6) of a league of Pharisees and Herodians against Him, and (viii. 15) of His own warning to His disciples to beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, and of the leaven of Herod. Perturbations in orbits of smaller bodies may sometimes indicate the influence of a larger planet, and possibly Herod and Herodians were not without links of connection, channels of information. More than one commentator has recalled the somewhat similar experience of the prophet Amos (vii. 10) when royal prerogative and professional monopoly seemed alike to be assailed by the outspoken intruder and drew together to resist the assault. It is difficult to know whether the Pharisees in our Lord's case were really messengers sent by Herod because that crafty king wanted a troublesome Visitor expedited from his dominions; or whether they acted on their own initiative, perhaps with the idea that our Lord, being driven into Judea, would be more within the power of the Sanhedrin. That they acted by way of genuine friendly warning seems unlikely; and, indeed, Christ's answer seems to imply that He heard the voice of Herod in their message and wanted to send back to Herod a direct reply. At any rate, when we come on to xvii. 11, we find Him still on the way to Jerusalem, but

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiii. still passing through the midst of Samaria and
31-35. Galilee. It looks as though His feet refused to be hurried by any attempt, whether on the part of Herod or of the Pharisees, to scare Him: with “deliberate speed, majestic instancy,” He pursued His appointed path.

Herod the
Cunning.

Perhaps the word *fox* flung sharply here at Herod is as startling as anything in our Lord's recorded utterances. “Go ye, and tell that fox—!” It is dangerous for us sinful men to use such language one of another, but He Who was the Truth and Who knew what was in man had right on His side. The quality aimed at is doubtless cunning, for which the fox has been proverbial in many languages and literatures. Possibly Dr Plummer puts his finger on the particular shade of that quality which Herod had been displaying, when he says that Herod's craftiness was in “trying to get rid of an influential leader and a disquieting preacher of righteousness by a threat which he had not the courage to execute. He did not wish to bring upon himself a second time the odium of having slain a prophet.” That fox! Jeremiah once bade his hearers run to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem and see if they could find a man. If any of them took sharp eyes with them to the task, they must have noticed how like man could sometimes be to his humbler relatives the beasts—they might find in one face a bovine stupidity, and in another a wolfish greed, in a third a feline cruelty, and in a fourth a foxy cunning. May the God of our redemption have mercy upon us lest we, who are men in name, scarcely attain

Severity and Tender Mercy

to be men indeed, but reel back into the beast Luke xiii. again! Of this particular quality of beast-like ³¹⁻³⁵ cunning which our Lord finds in Herod there is a famous historical instance which Dante pilloried for all time among the evil counsellors in the xxviii canto of the *Inferno*—Guido, Count of Montefeltro.

“Long as this spirit mov’d the bones and pulp
My mother gave me, less my deeds bespoke
The nature of the lion than the fox.
All ways of winding subtlety I knew,
And with such art conducted, that the sound
Reach’d the world’s limit.”

He was the crafty adviser of the crafty Pope, Boniface VIII, of whom it was said, “He came in like a fox, he ruled like a lion, he died like a dog.” But indeed craft has sometimes been reckoned a high quality in rulers. Did not Machiavelli say that “as a prince must act the part of a beast sometimes, he should make the fox and the lion his patterns. . . . From the fox a prince will learn dexterity in avoiding snares, and from the lion how to employ his strength in keeping wolves in awe. But they who entirely rely upon the lion’s strength will not always meet with success; in other words, a prudent prince cannot and ought not to keep his word, except when he can do so without injury to himself, or when the circumstances under which he contracted the engagement still exist.”¹ That line of reasoning has not entirely spent its force even in the modern world. But Herod and the Herod-type

¹ I am indebted for this quotation, as for the proverb about Boniface, to Dr J. S. Carroll in his fine *Commentary on the Inferno, Exiles of Eternity*.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiii. look very poor and mean when we see them through
31-35. the eyes of Christ. "That fox!—" the Master says, and Herod, though he wrap all his purple round him, cannot again look kingly.

The
Approach of
Tragedy.

"Tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected." Is it the echo of some such saying as this that we hear in a favourite thought of the writer to the Hebrews?—"It became Him, for Whom are all things and by Whom are all things, in bringing many sons into glory, to make the Captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings"; "And, being made perfect, He became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him"; "the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son Who is perfected for evermore."¹ He was sinless, yet He was made perfect, perfect in sympathy, perfect in human experience, perfect through suffering into Saviourhood: no wonder He strained towards His own perfecting as towards a goal greatly to be desired! For again His thoughts turned to that onward march: "nevertheless I must walk to-day, and to-morrow, and the day following; for it cannot be"—rather, it is not fitting: it could be, for John had perished at Machaerus—"it is not fitting that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem." There is grave irony here, as though He would say, "You may warn Me to flee from Herod; but Jerusalem, where *your* friends are, is in the light of all history the most dangerous place for a messenger of God."

¹ Heb. ii. 10; v. 9; vii. 28, Marg.

Severity and Tender Mercy

There is something haunting about this rhythmic Luke xiii. note of time, which so beats through these sentences, 31-35.

“to-day and to-morrow and the third day,” “to-day and to-morrow and the day following.” Professor J. A. Robertson¹ has skilfully analysed the pathos of it. It is “as if the great soul, caught up into the world of tragic movement, and under the pressure of the eternal significance of the unfolding heavenly drama, looks down almost with a feeling of oppression—a chafing at restraining fetters as time flows by beneath. There is a strange deliberation about the ticking of the seconds, the flight of time. Again and again the eager mind, straining at the leash of finitude, yet also committing Himself to it in confidence as part of His Father’s plan, goes running out over the arches of the span of time that lies between Him and the goal.

‘To-morrow, and to-morrow and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time!’

It is a familiar trick of the mind, intensely strung, in a tragic situation.”

2. These things are deep, but it is easier to write of them than of the simple tenderness of the words that follow—the Saviour’s cry over the city. Its occurrence here is one of the difficulties of the Synoptic problem: some more formal parables or aphoristic utterances might be repeated in different situations: this is an utterance that breaks from the heart in overpowering emotion—it is difficult to feel that it could be repeated and St Matthew

Love that
Shelters and
Pleads.

¹ *The Spiritual Pilgrimage of Jesus*, p. 277 f.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiii. 31-35. certainly gives the setting which seems the likeliest with city and temple for background. But be that as it may, the words themselves are of immortal beauty, a very revelation of the heart of Christ. There is a music, a human and natural music, in the very repetition, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem." The human heart in its great grief soothes itself thus, as David did when he cried, "O Absalom, my son, my son." There is a tragic glance along the corridors of a nation's history in the reproach, "which killest the prophets and stonest them that are sent unto thee": we shall hear that theme developed more completely when we reach the parable of the vineyard and the wicked husbandmen. Then what in the Bible or outside it rivals the tender compassion of what follows?—"How often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not." It is an amazing glimpse of a Personality. The figure was an old one, but it had been applied to the God of Israel, under Whose wings, as the Book of Ruth says, men had come to trust. What must He have believed about Himself, He who stood here as a man among men, a footsore pilgrim, seemingly more in need of shelter than able to give protection—what must He have felt about Himself when He spoke like this? It is not merely a glimpse of a Personality—all potentialities of protection and deliverance wrapped up in Him—but it is a glimpse of the conflict between His will and other wills. "How often would I!—Ye would not." All the love of the heart of Christ is in that

Severity and Tender Mercy

"How often would I." All the rebellion and pride **Luke xiii** and ingratitude of the heart of man are in that **31-35**.

"Ye would not." The clash of these opposing wills made the world's tragedy then. The clash of His will and ours makes our sin and our doom to-day.

A word has crept into v. 35 which probably **A House Forsaken** should not be there. The best MSS omit "desolate," and Westcott and Hort omit it in their edition of the New Testament. "Behold, your house is left unto you." There is no need to add "desolate": there can be no more ultimate desolation than this ~~that~~ "Jesus of Nazareth passeth by" and men are left to take the way that they have chosen. The last words of the verse are of uncertain interpretation. "Verily I say unto you, Ye shall not see Me, until the time come when ye shall say, Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord." Does this point merely to the triumphal entry? Does it point to the last Advent? Does it hint at a day when even from Jewry awakened hearts shall find in Him their Messiah and Lord? All these theories have been tried. In default of a clear decision we may fall back on the general principle which all three interpretations enshrine—that whensoever and howsoever He comes, happy are the hearts that welcome Him. The house cannot be desolate in which He lives and reigns.

FOR MEDITATION AND THANKSGIVING

Thou sparest when we deserve punishment,
and in Thy wrath thinkest upon mercy.

The Communion Service

LVII

HUMILITY AND LOVE

"And He put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when He marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room; lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. Then said He also to him that bade Him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."—LUKE xiv. 7-14.

Luke xiv.
7-14.

WE have already (Chapter LIII) been present at this feast watching the healing of the dropsical man. That itself would have made the occasion memorable; but it was made more memorable still by the table-talk that followed, which led up to and included the parable of the Great Feast. For the moment we are concerned with the two sections of teaching preceding that parable. To the guests He expounded the ethics of ambition. To

Humility and Love

the host He expounded the ethics of hospitality. Luke xiv. The double lesson might be packed into the two 7-14. words—Humility and Love.

1. He had something to say to His *fellow-guests*. The Law of Elbows. There was much human nature in their behaviour. That great law of the world's streets, the law of elbows, ruled the conduct round that table. Their selfish scheming did not escape His scrutiny. "He marked"—the Greek word is a strong one: He directed His attention to the fact—"how they chose out the best places." Perhaps during the healing of the man there was a momentary disarrangement of the gathering, space being cleared for so great a wonder. After it was all over, and the man dismissed, the normal grouping of the feast took place, and sundry important persons were noticed to be very careful that they got the important places, possibly the middle place on a reclining couch to hold three. He had His counsel for them—almost playful in its tone and yet probing far. He pictures the conduct He would like to see at a wedding—a wedding being perhaps chosen as a formal occasion when relative degrees of importance would be enforced. "Sit not down in the best place, lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden, and thou begin"—that word suggests the confusion of the moment when the man who has wrongly taken the place of honour realises his mistake and rises reluctantly to make way for somebody else—"and thou begin with shame to take the lowest place." There is a better plan. "Go and sit down in the lowest place: so that"—the note of intention here

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiv. 7-14. is in the mind of Christ : if it were in the mind of the guest it would take the fine flavour out of the action : a calculated humility is a pure hypocrisy and lowliness should not be made the ladder of ambition !—" So that, when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, come up higher "—nearer the host—" then shalt thou have honour in presence of them that sit at meat with thee."

God's
Groupings.

It puzzles us to be told that all this was " a parable to them which were bidden " : it does not seem specially parabolic. And yet it is parabolic in this sense that, like so much of our Lord's teaching, it was scarcely capable of a literal interpretation. If we all obeyed it literally, the scramble for lowest places would become almost as fierce as that for highest places had become among the Pharisees, and the counsel would defeat its own end. As we find in the Sermon on the Mount and elsewhere it is our Lord's way to teach by vivid instances. What He is really after is the life-tendencies of His hearers. His ultimate point is not etiquette at feasts, but, as v. 11 shows, the same lesson as was involved in the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. " Whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted." God has His own groupings to arrange. Those who wield power in this world may make many mistakes as to what they bestow on one man or withhold from another. But the honours-lists of God contain no blunders. And in His own time and way, in this life or another, He will see that the proud are

Humility and Love

dethroned and that the truly humble come to their heritage. Luke xiv.
7-14.

The passage raises the whole difficult but fascinating question of the true ethic of ambition. We can all see the ugliness of the scramble for chief seats in feast or synagogue. Yet not much worthier or lovelier would be the scramble for the lower level in the hope of being called to the higher. True evangelical humility begins by recognising that we are all on a level before Him, the level of the redeemed, the level of the invited: "*he that bade thee and him*"—neither the one recipient of the invitation nor the other has any reason to triumph over his neighbour. The same evangelical humility will not only often borrow the language of the pilgrims at the Interpreter's house—"You are fairer than I am," said one: and, "You are more comely than I am," said another—but it will often make a man find his happiness in advancing and encouraging another rather than in advertising and commending himself. And yet further, the true humility will trust God, the great Ruler of the feast of life, to find the true places for us all, to show us by His discipline and by our experience what our true place may be, and to bring us to it ultimately, however many people or things may get in the way. Ernest Renan somewhere says that glory is the thing which has the best chance of not being altogether vanity. Matthew Arnold, commenting on that saying, suggests that if we had an international tribunal, thoroughly equipped with knowledge and free from local partialities, and if good

True
Humility
and Glory.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiv.
7-14.

work of all kinds could be laid before it for judgment, the approval of such a tribunal would be a glory worth coveting, a glory which no man could afford to despise. We have not got our impartial, international tribunal—and yet we have, in the God before Whom we are all on a level. May He be pleased with us! and if we are bidden to come up higher, may His voice give or confirm the verdict!

Strange
Hospitality.

2. Christ turns from the guests to the host who was—it is only a guess but a likely guess—perhaps a trifle proud of the respectability and social worth of his assembled guests. Again the message was a kind of parable—a vivid instance to embody a general principle. Once more the note is almost playful: “When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours: lest”—it sounds like a warning of punishment to follow: *hic metus mundo ignotus*, Bengel says—the world has no dread of this sort of thing!—“lest they also bid thee again and a recompense be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind, and thou shalt be blessed”—the word which is so constantly used to describe those who are admitted to the innermost reality of the divine favour. In the light of Christ’s own practice, attending as He apparently did all sorts of friendly feasts, we cannot suppose Him to condemn entirely the ordinary social procedure of His neighbours, but He condemned the motive of those who only gave where they could get again. And this other kind of hospitality was not merely not to be

Humility and Love

neglected ; it had a glory of its own, in that the Luke xiv. baser motive could have no place in it. Its reward 7-14. was sublimated by being postponed to the resurrection of the just : the light of eternity was upon it.

Our Lord knew the world in which He lived, and He was wise in reminding men of this noblest type of hospitality which it was very easy for careless folk, and very customary for selfish folk, to forget. Effects and Causes. Wherever to-day, amid the intricacies of a much more complicated civilisation, the hungry are fed, the naked clothed, the waifs and strays provided for, the hearts that have done this thing are still blessed with the Master's ancient blessing. Yet we feel that He would give us liberty as to the letter of His words, if we keep alive, in ways suited to new times, their spirit. William Law, the non-juror, was one of those who exacted from himself a literal obedience to words like these, and it is said that by his doles he demoralised the whole district. We cannot imagine Christ giving His blessing to pauperisation, demoralisation, and the sapping of self-respect. The social system of every age is imperfect, and it is the duty of Christian beneficence to deal as best it can with the victims of a blundering system—to ease their straits and supply their need. But the call becomes more insistent to deal less with symptoms and more with causes : that perhaps, more than anything else in relation to poverty and misery, is the mind of Christ for the life of to-day. At least He would say to us, " This ye ought to have done, and not to leave the other undone."

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiv. The two sides of the message of the Master's
7-14. table-talk meet in one doctrine—the doctrine that
A Lesson for in the Kingdom of God welcome and promotion
the Church. do not go by worldly standards, welcome at the
 gates of the Kingdom, promotion in the ranks of
 the Kingdom. Welcome is not for the wealthy
 and contented but for the hungry: promotion is
 not for the proud and the grasping, but for the
 humble and those who have the spirit of service.
The Church can never be done with this passage
because she is perpetually tempted to forget the
lesson. She has often been inclined to admit to her
feast of honour and prominence the wrong people.
Even as early as the days of the Epistle of James
the man with the gold ring counted for far too much.

The scandal has often been renewed: Catherine
of Siena wrote to the Papal Legate of her day
imploring him and the Pope not to choose priests
and cardinals for money or flattery, and to get rid
of wolfish shepherds who cared for nothing but
feasts and palaces and horses.

In subtler forms the temptation remains and the
whisper sometimes runs through the streets of
Vanity Fair that the Church is worth neither heeding
nor persecuting, because she is only the world in
Sunday clothes. She has her welcomes, but not
for the hungry. She has her promotions, but not
for the lowly. If the Church makes her mistakes,
she pays for them; and her verdicts must find
ultimate revision at the hands of her God, Who
resisteth the proud but giveth grace unto the
humble.

Humility and Love

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Luke xiv.

7-14.

I commonly observe that almost all men, whether good or bad, do loathe the proud, and love the humble. So far indeed doth pride contradict itself that, conscious of its own deformity it often borrows the homely dress of humility. We have the more cause to be jealous of it, because it is a sin most deeply rooted in our nature, and as hardly as any extirpated from the soul.

Richard Baxter

LVI

THE DIVINE HOSPITALITY

“And when one of them that sat at meat with Him heard these things, he said unto Him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. Then said He unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and shewed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, Go out quickly into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind. And the servant said, Lord, it is done as thou hast commanded, and yet there is room. And the lord said unto the servant, Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled. For I say unto you, That none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper.”—LUKE xiv. 15-24.

Luke xiv. 15-24. **The Friendly Christ.** ONE may learn much of any personality whose words and ways are recorded in history if one can track out his favourite ideas. There are multitudes of thoughts and feelings which we all share, but we emphasise them differently, and difference of character is largely this difference of emphasis. It does not take much reading of the Gospels to discover

The Divine Hospitality

that social ideas took a comparatively large place Luke xiv. in the thoughts and feelings of our Lord : we may ^{15-24.} judge from this, even if we had no other evidence, that He had the social instinct very strongly : He was friendly : He was companionable : the ancient word concerning the Divine Wisdom was true of Him, the Wisdom Incarnate, "My delights were with the sons of men." We see this in His actions : again and again we find Him at table, sometimes with the respectables, sometimes with the disreputables. And we see it in His words, even when He is not at table : He loved to take weddings and feasts and to turn them into parables of something bigger than themselves. It is relevant in this connection to remember that the holiest and most central observance of His Church is a feast, which has continued without intermission at His bidding, since the night on which He was betrayed. It was natural to Him to express His Gospel after this fashion, for His own heart was overflowing with hospitality and joy.

As in the case of some others of our Lord's most memorable utterances, this parable of the wedding-feast had a casual origin—it arose out of a chance interruption on the part of one of those who sat at meat with Him, at the feast recorded in the preceding paragraphs. Catching up the general idea of eating and feasting which had been in the air, and indeed on the Master's lips, this man remarked, in a tone of complacent orthodoxy, "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God." Our Lord, Whose words were true and

A polite Bow
to God.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiv.
15-24.

faithful, disliked cant above most things. *Cant* comes from the same root as *chant*: it is not far removed from sing-song: it is the saying of what is believed to be the proper thing, in what is believed to be the proper tone, even though there be little grasp of the meaning and the heart be far away. Emerson brings the charge of canting overmuch against the whole Anglo-Saxon race. "The English . . . and the Americans cant beyond all other nations. The French relinquish all that industry to them. What is so odious as the polite bows to God in our books and newspapers?" "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the Kingdom of God"; so this guest at the Pharisee's table made his polite bow to God—his utterance did not mean much more.

And so our Lord spoke this parable as a reminder that even those who talk about the Kingdom are not always willing to receive it. The interest gathers round two main points—the amazing hospitality of God, the amazing indifference of men.

The Divine
Bounty.

1. *The hospitality of God* shines before us here with its many-coloured radiance—a hospitality eager, insistent, overflowing, inventive, and most persevering. "A certain man made a supper and bade many": were these first messages sent through the prophets? "And sent his servant at supper time to say to those that were bidden, Come, for all things are now ready": was this urgent servant himself the Son, Who came in the fullness of the time, at the striking of God's hour? For the moment we pass over the immediate guests, and watch the hospitality pushing itself outwards in

The Divine Hospitality

widening circles of endeavour. "Go out quickly Luke xiv. 15-24. into the streets and lanes of the city, and bring in hither the poor, and the maimed, and the halt, and the blind": were these the outsiders, some in physical infirmity, some in moral destitution, whom our Lord so yearned to seek and save, and whom He had been urging His host to find and help? And yet further, when the news was brought that still there was room, "Go out into the highways and hedges, and compel them to come in, that my house may be filled"—were these the outsiders of a remote world, lying beyond the borders of privilege, Gentiles and pagans whom a Jew never thought of as heirs of grace, but to whom we may well believe our Lord's compassionate heart often turned? We may not tie His picture-words down to too exact an interpretation: it is enough to bathe our souls in the thought of this abounding hospitality, this ever enlarging intention and desire. Every parable has its limitations: this one makes the greater grace look like an afterthought, an amendment upon the original purpose. But that belongs to the form of the story, not to the substance of its message: the Grace that seeks and saves even the seeming waifs and strays of humanity is no mere afterthought: it is an increasing purpose, born before time began to be, but working out in history its successive steps and stages. The point for the moment was that any one who wanted to eat bread in the Kingdom of God was certainly not without opportunity, but did men really want that? Our Lord's hospitable heart returned Him no very

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiv. hopeful answer : He came unto His own, incarnating
15-24. in Himself the divine hospitality, and His own
received Him not.

What is Christianity ? The question has often been asked, and all manner of answers have been given, with definitions ranging from the most abstruse theology to the barest and coldest morality. What is Christianity ? Would the answer come naturally to our hearts—*a feast of good things* ? Might not some of us more instinctively define it along the lines of deprivation and exaction ? This element is in it also : we have only to glance down the subsequent verses of this very chapter, and we shall find ourselves in full view of the Cross. Yet the grace which the Feast sets forth is in it too : indeed, it is the grace which makes the cross possible : it is because the servants of the Master have so much that they are able if need be to forsake so much and to endure so much. And after the struggle and the loneliness are over, the Feast shall be spread as never before.

The Evil
Heart of
Unbelief.

2. But it is the purpose of this parable to set over against the amazing hospitality of God the equally amazing indifference of men. The details which set this forth are not without a certain grim humour. Dr A. B. Bruce renders the opening phrase of v. 18 thus : “they all *out of one heart* began to make excuse.” The excuses were various—property obligations, farm duties, domestic entanglements, yet behind the various excuses there was one heart of unbelief. Churchmen of different schools sometimes rejoice to recognise an essential unity of faith running

The Divine Hospitality

across many differences of belief and practice ; and Luke xiv. in the same way, in the world of unbelief, one may notice, running across many hostile standpoints, many mutually destructive arguments, a strange unity of obstinacy. One man may have one reason for rejecting Christianity : another may have one entirely different, and yet behind them both there may be the same old heart, the same universal "stone of obstination." Our Lord was finding how true this was of the society around Him : there were many excuses, more or less presentable : there was one heart out of which they all came. The list of excuses given here is, of course, suggestive, not exhaustive : problems of home and farm and business were not all that took up men's minds. It was sufficient for the Master's purpose to present, in a vivid phrase or two, a picture of pre-occupation, indifference, ingratitude.

It may be a sad consolation to us in days of indifference that the Master Himself, come upon earth with the radiant revelation of the Love Divine, found how full of indifference His world could be. It was quite obvious that the Kingdom of Heaven must remain outside such souls. William James, that great master of psychology, has said, "My experience is what I agree to attend to." Out of the multitude of events, impressions, aspects of things, which flash by on any given day of this varied life, we only attend to a few : it is these which become a part of us : they are our experience. That is why religion for so many remains a tradition or less : they have never made it an experience by

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiv. attending to it whole-heartedly. And if the host
15-24. in the parable finally says, "None of those men
which were bidden shall taste of my supper," they
only get what they deserve. It is by no arbitrary
law that judgment thus mingles with mercy. Men
close Love's door against themselves. It is the
rule not only in the realm evangelical but in the
realm psychological that what I do not agree to
attend to becomes no part of my experience; and if
I do not attend to the Kingdom of Heaven when it
knocks repeatedly at my door it remains outside of
me, and I outside of it, naturally and inevitably.

The
Reasonable
Response.

It might be brought as an artistic criticism against
this parable that it depicts an incredible rudeness
—men in real life would never behave like this. It
is true, and yet the seeming defect in artistry
embodies a great moral and spiritual truth: this
is the Master's very point that men do treat God
as they would never dream of treating one another.
The host is reasonable in not wanting his supper
to be wasted, even as the shepherd in the following
chapter is reasonable in seeking his sheep, the
woman in sweeping for her coin, the father in
welcoming home his son. It is when our Lord
handles the attitude of men to God that He depicts
in story form the happening of unreasonable things.
If only men saw the reality of the divine hospitality,
if only they saw the glorious pity and tenderness of
the divine welcome, they would have no doubt as
to the reasonable response.

"Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all,"

The Divine Hospitality

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Luke xiv.

They are no fools who choose Christ, and sell^{15-24,}
all things for Him. It is no bairn's market :
we know well what we get and what we give.

Samuel Rutherford

LIX

ON COUNTING THE COST

"And there went great multitudes with Him : and He turned, and said unto them, If any man come to Me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after Me, cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it ? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand ? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassage, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple. Salt is good : but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be seasoned ? It is neither fit for the land, nor yet for the dunghill ; but men cast it out. He that hath ears to hear, let him hear."—LUKE xiv. 25-35.

Luke xiv.
25-35.
Sifting.

"THERE went great multitudes with Him." The reason for this popular following at this special moment is not assigned, but if we want a reason we might find more than one in what immediately precedes. Such a cure as that of the dropsical man must have made a stir in the community where it occurred, and such a parable as that of the great

On Counting the Cost

supper, perhaps spread by report from circle to Luke xiv. circle, and dimly understood, may have inspired ^{25-35.} vague visions of joy and contentment which kindled the imaginations of the multitude. But the Master never accepted souls in bulk. He was as wise in sifting as He was tender in welcoming. And when we read of multitudes, we might expect, even if we did not know, that some testing word is not far away. And indeed testing words are here—saying upon saying, touchstone after touchstone, until, as we read, we are almost tempted to echo the question of the disciples in another place, and ask, “Who then can be saved?” There may be “multitudes” at the beginning of this paragraph: when all the tests are applied, is there any one counted worthy to survive?

1. There comes first this hard saying, “If any ^{Forsaking} man come to Me, and hate not his father, and ^{All.} mother, and wife”—there was a man in the previous parable who said, “I have married a wife and therefore I cannot come”—“and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.” The spirit here is more than the letter, for the language is abrupt, deliberately startling, designed to stab slumbering spirits broad awake. The phrase “to hate one’s own life” is itself an interpretation of the linked idea of hating one’s nearest and dearest: a man cannot literally hate his own life, but he can do so comparatively and pictorially speaking, if he resolutely puts away its claims when a more imperative allegiance calls. The Master Who quotes with approval God’s com-

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiv.
25-35.

mandment, "Honour thy father and mother," and Who even on His cross is careful to provide a home for the mother from whom His redeeming task had sundered Him, could neither expect nor desire His disciples to hate father and mother in the literal sense. Yet He did expect them to subordinate even the dearest ties to the hard task of following Him and of advancing His Kingdom. In the disciple-experience of the ages, especially in generations when Christianity was struggling for its footing, and was more likely to be the possession of the young, impressionable and adventurous than of the old and settled, the pull of the family entanglement has been the sorest and mightiest of temptations. It was so in the first days. It has been so in Jewry through all the Christian centuries. It is so in India to-day. Again and again the disciples of Christ could not have come through unless their souls had been braced by some strong word like this, or that kindred saying in St Matthew (x. 37), "He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me." He dares to ask all—*all*! Dr Plummer quotes an apposite sentence from Gregory the Great, *Nec tamen sufficit nostra relinquere, nisi relinquamus et nos*: it is not enough to forsake our belongings, unless we also forsake ourselves. To yield our wills to His in absolute submission, this is all, because it is the essence and the motive of all.

Bearing the
Cross.

2. The same absolute demand reveals itself again, but in a new metaphor, equally startling and searching. "Whosoever doth not bear his cross,

On Counting the Cost

and come after Me, cannot be My disciple.” We **Luke xiv.** sometimes forget that Christ’s was not the first **25-35.** cross: the cross was an implement of doom unhappily familiar: historians say that some twenty years before our Lord’s ministry hundreds had been crucified in Galilee during a rebellion: perhaps the bearing of the cross had already been turned into a proverb. The Master has made it one of the most familiar parables in the Christian vocabulary. Do we always realise what it means, when we read or sing about it? In Galilee or Jerusalem, a man bearing his cross was known to be on his way to die; and in the Holy Land of the spirit a man bearing his cross is a man who has sentenced to death self and self-will. It is a hard law, but Christ will not suffer us to escape from it. John Bunyan puts it in homely but pungent fashion in one of his sermons. “You know, if one ask you the way to such and such a place, you, for the better direction, do not only say, This is the way, but then also say, You must go by such a gate, by such a stile, such a bush, tree, bridge, or such-like. Why, so it is here; art thou inquiring the way to heaven? Why, I tell thee, Christ is the Way; into Him thou must get, into His righteousness, to be justified; and, if thou art in Him, thou wilt presently see the Cross; thou must go close by it, thou must touch it, nay, thou must take it up, or else thou wilt quickly go out of the way that leads to heaven, and turn up some of these crooked lanes that lead down to the chambers of death.”

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiv. 3. If the law of life divine is so stern, it is well
25-35. that men should carefully count the cost of keeping
Counting the it, lest they start upon the task without courage
Cost. and resolution enough to carry them through.
Two parables are given to press this point home.
The first is that of the man who intends to build
a tower. There is a certain humour in the picture.
The man *sits down* to count the cost: he is very
deliberate and careful: one can almost see him in
the corner of the vineyard where the watch-tower
is to be built, doing hasty sums upon an improvised
slate, making sure what he will have to spend and
what he has in hand to meet his obligations. And
he is doubly careful because he hears beforehand
the scornful laughter of his neighbours, as they
discuss his futile structure, and point him out to
one another as the man who began to build but was
unable to finish. Dr A. B. Bruce asks the pertinent
question, "Who would care to be spoken of like
this all his days?" No one, certainly: but there
were some of those on the borders of discipleship
who were spoken of like this, and are so spoken of
still. The rich young ruler "turned away sorrowful."
Demas forsook Paul, having loved this present
world. These verdicts, once written, have proved
indelible. Would either man have stopped short
if they had known that verdicts such as these would
go echoing round their story down the corridors of
time? The other parable which points the same
lesson is that of the king going to make war against
another king. He, too, "sitteth down": he is
deliberate and careful, and either makes up his

On Counting the Cost

mind that he has resources sufficient for his plan Luke xiv. of campaign, or else he sends to his enemy as quickly 25-35. as possible, "while the other is yet a great way off," an offer of peace. This parable repeats and intensifies the lesson of the former, for a miscalculation in war is apt to lead to irrevocable disaster, and it cannot be hidden in a corner—it goes sounding through the world. And the lesson is just that which rings through all this paragraph—"Whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be My disciple." Self-renunciation, that is the cost of the high tower of the Christian character which the disciples of the Master undertake to build: that is the cost of the long campaign which they must wage for the Kingdom of their Lord.

4. There has been some discussion as to whether the verses which follow are in their proper place as a postscript to this passage. St Matthew gives the essential idea of them in the Sermon on the Mount (v. 13): St Mark puts them late in the story (ix. 50), after the Transfiguration. They belong to the order of aphoristic, pictorial utterances, which, once coined, might easily be repeated in different connections. Here, unless a clean break is made between v. 33 and v. 34, the saltiness of the salt must be the spirit of sacrifice. The disciple souls who keep that quality are still the salt of the earth, preserving it from corruption. But if that fades and disappears, what is there of worth or of service in the insipid remainder? "Men cast it out." It is another hard saying, but it has often been proved true in the history of the Church, for when the

The Spirit of
Sacrifice.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xiv. people of Christ have lost the sacrificial spirit, they
25-35. have lost the respect even of the unregenerate world around them.

**A Two-edged
Message.**

Between the lines, then, of every verse of this section, and in some of the actual words, open and unconcealed, there lies the repeated lesson—Count the cost! Count the cost! But there is a double object in counting the cost. If you cannot face it, it is better not to start at all: half finished tasks make kings and common men look foolish. But that is only one side of the matter: having counted the cost you may with deliberate and solemn confidence make up your mind to go on. When talk arose of new buildings for the Abbey of Clairvaux, Bernard dissuaded his monks from the task. “Good friends,” he said, “You know well enough that we have not the money, and to use the words of the Gospel, ‘He that intendeth to build a tower, must sit down first and count the cost, otherwise it will afterwards be said of him, This man began to build, but was not able to finish.’” His comrades had their answer ready. “True,” they said, “if the buildings of the monastery were complete, and God were pleased not to send any more sojourners to us, such an opinion might hold. But now we see our flock increase daily, and they who come must either be sent away, or a habitation in which to receive them must be found. We cannot doubt that He Who provides dwellers will provide houses for them also. But God forbid that, through fear of the expense, we run the risk of rejecting what He sends us.” Bernard rejoiced over their faith,

On Counting the Cost

and assented to their plan.¹ Sometimes the lesson Luke xiv of counting the cost is to go forward, not back. 25-35.

The cost of going back would be greater than that of going forward. *This man began to build and was not able to finish*—that is a poor epitaph for a life which has come within sight of the power and grace of God. We do well to covet a better—say this : *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith.* Or this : *Not one thing hath failed of all the good things which the Lord your God spake concerning you : all are come to pass.*

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Believe not those who say

The upward path is smooth,
Lest thou shouldst stumble in the way,
And faint before the truth.

It is the only road

Unto the realms of joy ;
But he who seeks that blest abode
Must all his powers employ.

Bright hopes and pure delights
Upon his course may beam,
And there amid the sternest heights
The sweetest flowerets gleam.

On all her breezes borne,
Earth yields no scents like those ;
But he that dares not grasp the thorn
Should never crave the rose.

Anne Brontë

¹J. Cotter Morison, *St Bernard*, p. 163 f.

LX

THE LOST SHEEP

"Then drew near unto Him all the publicans and sinners for to hear Him. And the Pharisees and scribes murmured saying, This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them. And He spake this parable unto them, saying, What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness, and go after that which is lost, until he find it? And when he hath found it, he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing. And when he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me; for I have found my sheep which was lost. I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."—LUKE xv. 1-7.

Luke xv.
1-7.
Perishing
Souls.

HE who would expound this chapter adequately—indeed, even he who would but read it aright—has great need to ask for a baptism into the tenderness of Christ. This was what was lacking in the case of the men with whom our Lord was in controversy; they were hard: they were incredulous: they may have counted themselves godly, but they were very ungodlike. He appeals to their reason—to their natural, ordinary, human instincts¹: "What man of you" would not act as the shepherd acts in the story, given the same

¹ This was a favourite line of appeal, cf. xii. 25, xiv. 5, xiv. 28, etc.

The Lost Sheep

set of circumstances? Yet in them, as in many **Luke xv.** souls still, love needed to be intertwined with **1-7.** reason: they needed to be trained in the school of the Gospel, to be baptised with the spirit of redemption. That quaint, wise soul, Thomas Boston, was once hesitant as to his duty when he was urged by a friend to publish a certain volume: he did not want to do it to glorify himself. But his heart was held by a phrase in his friend's letter: "let respect to duty and the salvation of perishing souls sway you." "That word, *perishing souls*, nailed my heart," he wrote; "and it burst out and answered, 'Then let me be a fool for perishing souls.' And now for perishing souls, I dare not but try that work, come of me what will." We may reverently say that our Lord felt like that when He gathered round Him the outcasts of His day. His heart was "nailed" to the task by sheer pity for perishing souls. If we are moved by the same pity, we shall need no other interpretation of His words and actions here: He will be His own best interpreter and defender.

It would be the supreme irony of history, were it not the very Gospel of the Divine Compassion—this glimpse of Jesus, the pure and holy, in such close and frequent comradeship with the outcasts and disreputables of His day. The *all* in "all the publicans and sinners" is probably not an exact numerical word, but rather a word of habit: this was so constant a thing that it became an outstanding and characteristic element in His ministry. No wonder they came to Him!—since He cared

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xv. 1-7. for them, respected them, found in them something worth His thought and care. The scribes and Pharisees, onlookers and critics, despised this lower stratum morally and intellectually. But God's market is not run by the rules of Jerusalem, and it was for those bankrupt souls that Christ brought forth the loveliest wares of the divine bounty. The three immortal parables of this chapter—those of the Lost Sheep, the Lost Coin, and the Lost Son—were His defence of His own action, the apologetic of Jesus—not the dry logic of a scholar but the unfolding of the heart of a Redeemer.

In the story of the Lost Sheep, let us concentrate on three moments in the action.

The Shepherd on his Quest. 1. *The Shepherd goes out on His quest.* “What man of you, having an hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, doth not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness”—the unfenced pasture-land round the fringes of Judea, between cultivated ground and the desert proper—“and go after that which is lost until he find it?” Our Lord has made this shepherd-figure immortal, and immortally beautiful, but it was already familiar. “The Lord is my shepherd.” “Behold I, even I, will both search My sheep and seek them out.” “He shall feed His flock like a shepherd.”¹ One wonders what thoughts had been stirred in His own mind by ancient words like these, and to what extent His own great pity for those who were “scattered abroad, as sheep not having a shepherd” had taught Him not only His own call to the task but

¹ Ps. xxiii. 1; Ezek. xxxiv. 11; Is. xl. 11.

The Lost Sheep

His fitness for it. He longed to be the Shepherd Luke xv. of souls, to seek them, find them, bring them home. 1-7.

To Him it was reasonable and natural that He should go on such an errand and that God should send Him, for He never departed from the assumption that His great Father in the heavens had Himself a shepherd-heart. That truth was obviously not wholly grasped, not fully believed, by many of the pietists of Israel. Is it fully believed among us even yet? Dr A. B. Bruce calls it "the great Christian doctrine concerning God which the world never has believed, and which the Church has only half-believed." If the Church had fully believed it, could she have been so narrow and parochial in her outlook as she often has been? Would the evangelisation of the world by the Church have been so slow and partial? Would her zeal for the welfare of the lost and sinful have been so faint and intermittent? Let us be honest and write ourselves down as half-believers in the doctrine: we have need that the Shepherd-Christ Himself should come after us to the foggy lands of our half-belief and bring us to His own standpoint!

2. *The Shepherd turns homewards.* The thing to notice is His burden, for in all the lovely teaching of the Master there is nothing more exquisite. "He goeth after that which is lost until he find it, and when he hath found it he layeth it on his shoulders, rejoicing." There are two pictures in the one picture. The first is the suggestion of *weariness and helplessness*. The Shepherd must do all: the wandering sheep is beyond the power to help itself

The Shepherd
and His
Burden.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xv.
1-7.

or make its own way home. This is the same thought as breathes through the Shepherd-passage in St Matthew's Gospel (ix. 36): "He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted and were scattered abroad." And the second is the suggestion of a *generous strength* with much to spare for others. The Shepherd is burdened as he turns homewards, but he counts it a happy burden if he has the shepherd-heart at all—"he layeth it on his shoulders, *rejoicing*." The Shepherd of souls is burdened too. Was He not burdened then with the cares and sorrows and sins of those who sought Him? But He had strength enough for the burden, because He had love enough for it, and love made His labour light. And still!—who shall measure the weight that hangs upon His willing shoulders as souls from all the round world still lay their sins and troubles upon Him and learn to say, "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day"?

The
Shepherd's
Return.

3. *The Shepherd returns triumphant.* There is something delightfully human in this picture of simple, single-hearted, overflowing gladness. "When he cometh home, he calleth together his friends and neighbours, saying unto them, Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost." Not that humanity with its somewhat sour and selfish tendencies always lives up to this happy picture! "There would be much happiness introduced into the world," Bishop Butler says, "in proportion as the precept of rejoicing with those who rejoice was

The Lost Sheep

universally obeyed. Our Saviour has owned this **Luke xv.** good affection as belonging to our nature in the **1-7.** parable of the lost sheep; and does not think it to the disadvantage of a perfect state to represent its happiness as capable of increase, from reflection upon that of others." The loving and generous heart of Jesus knew the joy of rejoicing with others, and He expected others to rejoice with Him when He had the great joy of success in His ministry of mercy. The happy shepherd in the parable bears himself as Christ would have liked to do. He did bear Himself so, rejoicing in the salvation of the lost, challenging others with His joy. And the meagreness of the response from sour-faced, narrow-hearted men was one of the shadows that darkened His days.

As He brought His parable to a close, did His heart hear some far-off music

" Faint
As from beyond the limit of the world " ?

He is strangely dogmatic about it, as if the thought led Him into regions where He is thoroughly at home. "*I say unto you* that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth more than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance." We should not have known it without His word: we must be content to take it on His word. Dante has turned the same conception into another form when he leads his pilgrims up the Mount of Cleansing, and they learn that the whole mass thrills with joy from base to summit

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xv.
1-7.

whenever a soul makes its escape. That, Dante says, is "the religion of the place," and Dante there is not far from our Lord's teaching as to what is the essential spirit of the Universe. Do we believe that there reigns at the heart of things a Love like this? If we more than half believed it, would it not enlarge our charity and pity? Would not the thought of it recall ourselves when we wander and stray?

"If our love were but more simple
We should take Him at His word,
And our lives would be all sunshine
In the sweetness of our Lord."

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Hear us, O hear us, Lord; to Thee
A sinner is more music, when he prays,
Than spheres' or angels' praises be
In panegyric Alleluias.

John Donne

LXI

THE LOST COIN

"Either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle, and sweep the house, and seek diligently till she find it? And when she hath found it, she calleth her friends and her neighbours together, saying, Rejoice with me; for I have found the piece which I had lost. Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth."—LUKE xv. 8-10.

THIS little parable has a place of its own in the Luke xv affection of Christendom. It is true—the parable 8-10. of the lost sheep makes more appeal to the imagination, and the parable of the lost son has more stimulus for the emotions. But we are all glad that the tale of the lost coin is here. There is something very lifelike about the domesticity of it. Had the Son seen something like it happen in the house at Nazareth? We watch almost with amusement the eagerness and thoroughness of the woman's search—Martha of Bethany if not Mary of Nazareth might have sat for the portrait—the lighting of the candle, the sweeping of the floor, the turning out and turning over of everything. And then we can hear the happy clamour of tongues, as the neighbours look in to turn the discovery into a little festival. Yet the domestic truth of the picture cannot hide its deep, evangelic purpose: it is the

A Domestic
Parable

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xv.
8-10.

second ingredient in the Master's gracious defence of Himself for loving and seeking the sinful.

Some interpretations have rather obscured the beautiful simplicity of the parable. There have been spiritualising interpretations in which the woman has been the Church, or perhaps the woman has been the Spirit and the house the Church. Or another line has been taken by some of the mystics, followed by George Fox: the house is the soul: the coin was lost indoors: and if we would find the chief good, the heavenly treasure and joy, we must search within. But this is interpretation made artificial: let us take the parable naturally and see where it brings us.

A Little
Common
Coin.

1. It was a small thing that was lost. A drachma—let us say a sixpence—a little familiar coin. It is possible that our Lord wanted to meet His critics upon common ground. They set small value on the outcasts of society, and He seems to say, Let it be so if you will. Let it be granted that they are of small importance in the conventional scheme of society. Yet the housewife will search and sweep to find a sixpence that has tumbled to the floor. And it is worth while to show the same care even for the odds and ends in the household of God. Things sometimes conspire to suggest to us how small we human creatures are. Nature sends her floods to overwhelm us as if the individual were of no account in her plan. The nations send their armies out—each man in the ranks a living conscious being, and yet there to be shot down if need be, theirs not to reason why. And history slowly

The Lost Coin

works out the same suggestion in her huge deliberate **Luke xv.** way by the oblivion she casts over the life and work **8-10.** of the million : the wind passes over them and they are gone and the place that knew them once knows them no more. There are times when human life seems a very small affair—this little common coin which the woman lost makes a good picture of it.

2. Yet if we go too fast and far along that line, From God's Mint. the parable itself will turn against us. There is something here which tends to cancel this whole line of argument, or at any rate to stop it soon. This silver sixpence which has tumbled to the floor is indeed a small thing : but it is at least *a coin*. It may be a part of the woman's spending money, or more probably an item in an ornament upon which many coins are strung. But small though it be, it is not a mere useless bit of metal : it is coin, with an image and superscription upon it : it has a value and belongs to a royal service. Now the thought of the littleness of human life needs to be completed and corrected by another. This same human life bears indications that it has been made for some high destiny—that it deserves a better fate than merely to be cast away and lost : marks of divine ownership, marks of divine workmanship, are upon it. Where is the Mint in which God makes this silver coin of human souls, and what are the tools with which He engraves upon them His own image, the sign of His high purpose for them ? We do not know where or how the mysterious thing is done ; but the fact remains, manifest and indestructible. Our Lord had eyes to see this and

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xv.
8-10.

courage to declare it. It was easy to label this man a publican and this woman a sinner ; but He wanted to add something to these surface discoveries, these easy verdicts. These men and women were coin from the mint of God—lost perhaps, soiled and worn and bent, and needing to be made anew, yet with the ring of the right metal in them still, and the royal marks showing through all the grime. We must dare to believe that He spoke the truth. And if He spoke the truth, we must despise no man : we must honour all men : we must reverence ourselves.

The Loss to
the Owner.

3. But we touch now the heart of the parable : it was a small thing, this silver sixpence, but *it was lost*. It is surely one of the special points of significance that the owner's loss is made so prominent. We are meant to confront the thought that by the sin and straying of men God Himself is the loser. It is most abundantly true that men suffer loss unspeakable by their own wandering : there are two glimpses of that in this same chapter—the lost sheep in the wilderness, far from fold and pasture, the tattered and broken figure in the far country, sent into the fields to feed swine. But in this middle parable, we do not stay to spend sympathy on the inanimate coin : our attention is brought to a focus upon the loss which the owner has sustained. God has suffered loss : He feels His loss, and even at the cost of infinite toil and trouble He will seek and save that which was lost. How easily men toss one another aside, like worn out tools, or allow one another to disappear like

The Lost Coin

coins of low value, not worth searching for! That Luke xv. is not God's way, nor the way of those who share ^{8-10.} His spirit. And because it is not possible to tell in human speech the value God sets upon every soul, Christ has given us His own inimitable words to hint it. We, each of us, even the least, are worth much to Him.

"All that the world's coarse thumb
And finger failed to plumb . . .
All I could never be,
All men ignored in me,
This I was worth to God."

He values us because He loves us, and because in our wandering He loses not only instruments made for His service, but hearts meant for His fellowship and joy.

This parable then, while a Gospel for any soul, is specially a Gospel for the humble, for those who have little standing in the sight of the world, for those whose temptation is to despise themselves. Mark Rutherford says that he would like to add one more beatitude to those of the Sermon on the Mount—"Blessed are they who heal us of self despisings," and he adds that of all the services which can be done to man he knows of none more precious. This parable is one of the many gracious ways by which the Physician of men would render that precious service to timid and hesitant souls.

"I was not resolute in heart and will
To rise up suddenly and seek Thy face,
Leaving the swine-husks in the desert place,
And saying, 'I have sinned, receive me still.'"

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xv.
8-10.

I could not, even, at the Shepherd's voice,
Startle and thrill with yearnings for the fold,
Till He should take me in His blessed hold
And lay me on His shoulder and rejoice.

But lying silent, will-less in the dark,
A little piece of silver, lost from Thee,
I only knew Thy hands were seeking me
And that I bore through all Thy heavenly mark."

And doubly because of the mark upon it when the coin is retrieved, it is retrieved not for idleness but for service. It is property. It is a servant of the person who owns it, or, better, of the king whose image and superscription it bears. There is a difference after all between coins and souls. When a coin has seen long service, the image of the king becomes blurred and faint. But the more thoroughly a soul learns to serve the more perfectly does the likeness of its King shine out upon it, until at last in heaven where the service is perfect, the likeness shall be perfect also.

FOR MEDITATION AND THANKSGIVING

We are never lost, we are never nobodies in the dear world of God's all-seeing love and all-loving providence. According to His standards an empire is a less thing than a single soul.

F. W. Faber

LXII

THE LOST SON

“ And He said, A certain man had two sons : And the younger of them said to his father, Father, give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son gathered all together, and took his journey into a far country, and there wasted his substance with riotous living. And when he had spent all, there arose a mighty famine in that land ; and he began to be in want. And he went and joined himself to a citizen of that country ; and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would fain have filled his belly with the husks that the swine did eat ; and no man gave unto him. And when he came to himself, he said, How many hired servants of my father's have bread enough and to spare, and I perish with hunger ! I will arise and go to my father, and will say unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and before thee, And am no more worthy to be called thy son ; make me as one of thy hired servants. And he arose, and came to his father. But when he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him. And the son said unto him, Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in thy sight, and am no more worthy to be called thy son. But the father said to his servants, Bring forth the best robe, and put it on him : and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet : And bring hither the fatted calf, and kill it ; and let us eat, and be merry : For this my son was dead, and is alive again ; he was lost and is found. And they began to be merry. Now his elder son was in the field : and as he came and drew nigh to the house, he heard musick and dancing. And he called one of the servants, and asked what these things meant. And he said unto him, Thy brother is come : and thy father hath killed the fatted calf, because he hath received him safe and sound. And he was angry, and would not go in : therefore came his father out, and intreated him. And

St Luke xii.—xviii.

he answering said to his father, Lo, these many years do I serve thee, neither transgressed I at any time thy commandment : and yet thou never gavest me a kid, that I might make merry with my friends : But as soon as this thy son was come, which hath devoured thy living with harlots, thou hast killed for him the fatted calf. And he said unto him, Son, thou art ever with me, and all that I have is thine. It was meet that we should make merry, and be glad : for this thy brother was dead, and is alive again ; and was lost, and is found.”—LUKE xv. 11-32.

Luke xv.

11-32.

The Parable
of Parables.

If this parable is the sinner's hope it is also the expositor's despair : it is so clear that it needs no expounding, so perfect that it does not need its colours heightened or its shadows deepened. He who wishes to extract its message for himself or for others may well pray afresh for a baptism into the Saviour's tenderness, and into His wisdom too—that wisdom which could read like an open book the heart of God and the heart of man.

The theme that for the third time, and in its most perfect form, rings through these glorious verses, is the joy of finding what is lost. Evidently the Master had brooded much over that : He had watched it in life, the joy of the shepherd, the joy of the housewife, the joy of a parent who sees a self-banished member of his family return home. There is a curious reiteration of the idea of possession : “What man of you *having* an hundred sheep ?” . . . “What woman *having* ten pieces of silver ?” . . . “A certain man *had* two sons.” But in this last case possession took its most sacred, intimate, and tender form : he who has sheep or coins or any other form of wealth moves to a different level, speaks with a different intonation when he

The Lost Son

looks upon his sons and calls them his. And just Luke xv. as this last property-value is a climax to all other ^{II-32.} property-values, so this parable, even had it been shorter and less perfect in form, would have been the climax of the three. It is indeed the climax of all the parables. In it God's love is made perfect in speech as on the cross it was made perfect in sacrifice.

Here are two composite portraits joined into a ^{Twin} story. The son whom we commonly call the prodigal ^{Portraits} is obviously drawn from life : his portrait gathers into itself the recognisable features of the "publicans and sinners" mentioned in v. 1. The elder son is drawn from life also : no one can doubt that in his sour countenance our Lord has painted the scribes and Pharisees of v. 2, who murmured at the divine hospitality revealed in the mission of His Son. Some have thought that they found in the two sons a yet wider reference—the younger son being the Gentile, the older the Jew, hot-hearted, narrow-minded, hating to see outsiders made fellow-citizens with the saints. There might have been a certain fitness in such an interpretation, especially at the time when the Gentiles began to seek the homeward way and the Jews were intensely bitter about it : one can imagine that, if St Luke preached as well as wrote, he may well have taken this parable of his own preserving and turned the moral of it to such a purpose. Yet such a use, if such a use were made, was an adaptation, and the situation described in vv. 1 and 2 was sufficient motive for the creation of the parable and sufficient illuminant of its essential meaning.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xv.
11-32.
The Limits
of Parable.

It may not be needless to remind ourselves that this is a parable. For if we take the story too literally it is decidedly open to criticism, and has indeed been criticised. It has been pointed out that it is the prodigal—not the virtuous elder brother—the wayward, thoughtless spendthrift—not the careful stay-at-home husbandman—who has the good time. When he, as Samuel Johnson describes such a one,

“Loosen’d from the minor’s tether,
Free to mortgage or to sell,
Wild as wind and light as feather,
Bids the sons of thrift farewell,”

he gets his independence. He enjoys the freedom of his own will. He finds gay company. He has experiences which might make dull eyes, dulled by dull conditions, kindle with envy. Then, indeed, he has a short time of want and misery to bring him to his senses, but he speedily comes home to a royal welcome and a position better than if he had never been away. The diligent son, on the other hand, has found life to be all work and no play, and might naturally wish in these circumstances that he had wandered too and by his wandering earned a little music and dancing. It is this way of reading the story that justifies the bitter remark of a modern novelist: “If you are extremely good you will run less chance of Jesus being interested in you than if you are extremely bad.”¹ Yet only a clumsy interpretation could issue in such a conclusion. This is not to be taken as a literal story,

¹ Benjamin Swift.

The Lost Son

though it may have been suggested by an actual **Luke xv** instance. It is a parable of what goes on in the **11-32**. spiritual sphere. From our Lord's standpoint, and in the light in which He saw real values, the prodigal in the far country was not having a good time, any more than a madman in his delirium. The essential tragedy here is not the outward poverty and rags, which the picture must show because it is a picture, but the forgetfulness of a human heart towards God and goodness. The husks and the swine-trough are only the symbol of a spiritual condition. And further, from our Lord's standpoint, the son who stayed at home was not so satisfactory as he imagined his brother to be. He may have had more sense of duty: when his brother came he was "in the field," perhaps just a little proud of the fact that he was not eating the bread of idleness. And this picture too was a parable,—of those who turned their religion into a mere task. They were forgetful of the joy of God's fellowship, even as some others had been forgetful of the moral responsibilities of His service. And to Christ, Who never could think of the fellowship without the service, or of the service except in the light of the fellowship, these also had wandered away though they had gone by a different track.

In this parable, we get a glimpse, divinely simple, divinely beautiful, of three great things.

1. We see *the relation of God to men*. We see God and what He wants to be to men—never more tenderly ^{Man.} or more perfectly expressed. We see Him *trusting human souls with the gift of freedom*: "he divided

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xv.
11-32

unto them his living. And not many days after the younger son"—free to wander and exercising his freedom—"gathered all together and took his journey." From the first life that began the human story in this world, down to those who are choosing and wandering to-day, God, in His supreme sovereignty, in His inscrutable wisdom, in His loving hopefulness, takes that risk: He is content to take that risk. We see Him *waiting* patiently *for the return* of the hearts that He has made for Himself. It is dangerous to treat any parable as an exhaustive unfolding of the Gospel: no parable is complete. This parable does not tell of search and pleading and remonstrance. Such other parables as those of the Lost Sheep or the Great Feast supply its lack. And yet it shows patient waiting, and it reminds us that God does not violently interfere with those who have their free will for their birth-right. He waits for their hearts to turn. And then we see Him *eagerly welcoming* the wanderer back. "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran." It has been remarked that Aristotle said of his magnificent man that he never ran: he was too dignified to run. But our Lord was so desirous of painting the divine eagerness here that He allowed the divine dignity to take care of itself. Can it be that God is indeed like this? The Pharisees did not believe it. Some of the prophets of Israel had painted Him in colours not so very different from this—a God Who refused to give up His wandering children¹, a God Who

¹Hosea xi. 8.

The Lost Son

“rose up early” in His eagerness to turn their **Luke xv.** hearts to Himself. Some of the children of the **II-32.** prophets had grown narrow and formal, and pictured their God in their own image. But Christ knew what God was like and He spoke what He knew.

2. We see with equal clearness *the relations of* ^{Man and} *men to God*, so wayward, so self-willed, so ungrateful, ^{God.} forgetting even while their Father remembers. And yet even in that apparently loose relationship, broken at will, there is something organic and permanent, which sooner or later asserts itself. “When he came to himself”—the delirium faded, the moral landscape seen again in the cold light of deliberate judgment—“he said, I will arise and go.”

“Thus all things seek for rest,
A home above, a home beneath the sod;
The sun will seek the west,
The bird will seek its nest,
The heart another breast
Whereon to lean: *the spirit seeks its God.*” ¹

Part of the sin of the Pharisees was their lack of insight into the facts of human nature: they did not believe in this nobler part of the humanity around them, and too often saw only common clay. And another part of their sin was their lack of hope, because they did not fully believe in the Love and Grace to which all welcomes and all restorations were possible. Had they possessed these two qualities they would have known that from the uttermost, most squalid, most despairful

¹ Dora Greenwell.

St Luke xii.--xviii.

Luke xv.
11-32.

corner of any far country there was a way open to the Father's house and the possibility of a real return. And instead of finding an offence and a heresy in the gathering of outcasts round about the Saviour, they would have seen in it the most moving sight that a broken, fallen humanity can produce, the promise of a world redeemed and restored. There is a great and hopeful philosophy of human nature enshrined in the words, "When he came to himself," even as there is the thrust of an evangelistic theology in the phrase, "When he was yet a great way off his father saw him and had compassion and ran." Happy even in their poverty are souls who have learned that philosophy, and turned, at the bidding of their own higher nature, from the husks and the shams, to seek their true portion.

"So much have friends deceived me
And fickle lovers grieved me;
Of so much wealth
And youth and health
Hath travelling Time relieved me,
That, being thereby set free,
Now back I come to Thee." ¹

Man and
his Brother.

3. And last we get a glimpse of *the relations of men to one another*—often narrow and bitter and grudging. Especially we see the danger of the view which the professing servants of God may sometimes take of the returning penitent. We need not trouble ourselves to prove our Lord's love for goodness or His desire that men should loyally and

¹ Laurence Housman.

The Lost Son

consistently obey the Father's commandments. On Luke xv. that score He is able to defend Himself—He who ^{11-32.} “loved” the rich young ruler and had friends such as the family of Bethany. But the legal type of goodness is apt to have two great faults. The first is *pride*: probably in v. 7 the reference to “ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance” is a gentle irony, of which the portrait of the elder brother is a yet more vivid embodiment. For the moment the Master takes those people at their own valuation, but contrives to reveal how much their goodness is marred by their pride. And the second fault is *hardness*: “The Pharisees and scribes murmured, saying, This Man receiveth sinners and eateth with them”: there, before the eyes of the Saviour, in the community around Him, stood the elder brother who, even when the Father's banished were manifestly returning, could see no reason for music and dancing. To Christ, some of these sins were harder to repent of than those which the world would more readily condemn. Our Lord had failures in His ministry, and His chief failures were among the self-satisfied religious. Here lies one of the most solemn and searching warnings for His Church—a warning that still flames from the heart of this story. When souls come back to God from the east and the west, do those who name the name of Christ thrill with the gladness that thrilled their Master, or do they wear so sour a look that the outsider is tempted to remain outside rather than join so ungracious and inhospitable a company? The Elder Brother is only a true brother when he

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xv. shares the Father's spirit: he is only safe himself
11-32. when he too has learned to say, "I have sinned
against heaven, and in Thy sight, and am no more
worthy to be called Thy son."

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

One of two things is needed to save man from destruction: either an absolute obedience to moral law, or the forgiveness of sins. Blake—who once told a friend that he learned everything he knew from the Bible, a book that always lay beside him as he worked and that he admits reading "day and night"—found in the Old Testament the impossibility of obedience and in the New the promise of forgiveness.

Editor's Note to Blake's Jerusalem

LXIII

A SCHOOL FOR SAINTS

And He said also unto His disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. So he called every one of his lord's debtors unto him and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations."—LUKE xvi. 1-9.

THIS parable is more of a problem than most of Luke xvi. our Lord's parables. The puzzle is partly textual, 1-9. and some of the difficulties are removed if we can draw a mental line upon the page between v. 9 and v. 10 and cease to regard vv. 10-12 as part of the parable or even as part of the immediate comment upon it. They are a group of sayings attracted

Parable and
Problem.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvi.
1-9.

here perhaps by similarity of theme, but belonging to a different vein of thought. Yet even when we concentrate upon vv. 1-9, a part of the puzzle remains, and it is a moral puzzle: this is the only one of our Lord's parables which raises a moral problem. There have been attempts to escape from this: Dr Martineau has one which is very ingenious. He makes this a parable for publicans. The rich man is the Roman government. The steward is the local publican to whom the taxes were farmed out. The debtors are the Jewish people. And the master's commendation of his servant's conduct reflects the fact that the Roman government was elastic in its methods, and would rather obtain eighty bushels of wheat without fuss, by the use of a little palm-oil, than a hundred secured by force and friction. This is alluring but too ingenious. The moral difficulty, after all, disappears on a closer examination, for Christ did not Himself commend the crooked conduct of the steward, but merely recorded the cynical admiration of the steward's employer, who quite possibly thought that to "do" others as others "do" you was a golden rule of a kind, if only a man were clever enough to work it. It is quite conceivable that our Lord had in mind an actual case, from the tax-gatherer's realm or some other, where two men, a master and an inferior, had been birds of a feather, and one of them, losing, had admired the skill of the other, winning.

A Strange
School

The only lesson our Lord means us to take from the story might be stated in this form—that it is

A School for Saints

good for saints, occasionally at least, to *learn from* Luke xvi. *sinner*s. This is rather a startling idea from the 1-9 standpoint of the saint. He has long been accustomed to open schools and mission-halls for the good of the sinner: he is scarcely prepared to have the tables turned upon him, and to have it hinted that the sinner has the right to open school and mission-hall for the saint. But it is good for the saint to be startled sometimes and the Lord of all the saints was not in the least afraid to be unconventional. This is how He states this startling principle. "The children of this world are *in their generation*," i.e. for their own ends and purposes—"wiser than the children of light." They have more faith in their own methods. They have more skill of their chosen tools. They have more inventiveness and resourcefulness. Therefore even those who seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness may have something to learn from those whose only interest is in the questions, "What shall we eat?" and "What shall we drink?" and "Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" In this general lesson two points especially are illumined by the parable.

1. We may say of the children of this world that *their realities are real to them*. This steward knows Solid Realities. what he is after. He has no doubt about its value. He does not traffic in theories, hypotheses or abstractions. He does business in realities. When he was appointed steward, he knew that he was in for a good thing. And now that he has been found out and is being driven forth into the wilderness, he knows that there are still comfortable realities to

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvi.
1-9.

be sought, an easy-chair by a friend's chimney-corner, a share in a neighbour's porridge-pot, a bed made by hands that have reason for gratitude. Details apart, it is the way of the children of this world: their realities—bed and board and balance at the bank—are real to them. In the *Upton Letters* there is a picture of a certain Mr Welbore. "Welbore's idea of the world is a pleasant place where such men as he can make money and have a good time. He thinks art, religion, beauty, poetry, music, all stuff." If we translate that into another mode of speech, we get the steward in the parable. His livelihood is to him the one reality, and conscience, loyalty, integrity, are all "stuff."

If, then, the saints would go to school with the sinners, and with the Mr Welbores of this world, they would learn that these people have realities which are real to them. The actor may sometimes have reason to say to the preacher, "I speak fiction as if it were truth: you speak truth as if it were fiction." And does not the Unjust Steward cry out to us across the ages with an intensity which rebukes us all, "I pursued the temporal as though it were the eternal: you pursue the eternal as if it were less than the temporal"? In this point at least, of living as though their realities were real to them, the children of light must look to their laurels, lest the children of this world be wiser than they.

The Onrush
of To-
morrow.

2. The children of this world are wise, too, in another aspect: *they know that to-morrow grows out of to-day*. Dr Moffatt translates v. 8 thus: "the master praised the dishonest factor for looking

A School for Saints

ahead, for the children of this world look farther **Luke xvi.** ahead in dealing with their own generation than **1-9.** the children of light." Now that is true. Upon the walls of this world's school all sorts of prudent maxims are written up, about laying by for a rainy day, about a stitch in time saving nine, about not putting all one's eggs in one basket; and who will say that in such matters the children of this world are not wise? The steward is typical in his self-regarding prudence. His present fortunes are tumbling round him like a house of cards: his one thought is of the best way to prepare for the future; and he devises his clever plan, so that in the gaunt and naked future he may not be altogether without house and home. And his lord commended the unjust steward because in this sense and to this extent, he had done wisely—he had feathered his nest against a chill to-morrow.

The saints profess to believe in a far greater To-morrow than poor short-sighted sinners are supposed to foresee. But do they believe in it as vividly and intensely as the world believes in the to-morrow for which it hopes and plans? And do they realise that they too are stewards and that when the great To-morrow comes they too must give account? Our Lord immediately directs this thought upon one special point—the stewardship of wealth. He wanted the children of light to see how even with their material possessions they might win a priceless heritage—the joy and gratitude of other souls. "Make to yourselves friends by means of the mammon of unrighteousness." Now the word

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvi.
1-9.

“mammon” has an ugly sound, but it was simply the Syriac word for money, and our Lord, in calling it the mammon of unrighteousness, perhaps used some proverbial phrase which enshrined the feeling that there was much dirty money in the world, wrongly made and basely spent. There may be an allusion to some among His disciples who, like Matthew, had been publicans. A few, like Zacchaeus, were told to restore fourfold. But there might be others whose former victims were no longer accessible—such men might by beneficence do something to atone for their former greed. But even apart from such special reference, the lesson is that he who uses his money to do good prepares a great welcome for himself on the other side. Our Lord sounded no doubtful note on this theme: “Give to the poor and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.” “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these, my brethren, ye have done it unto Me.” What more blessed welcome could there be at the gates of the eternal dwelling-place than the outstretched hands and shining eyes of those whom we have helped and blessed? The Master counts much else well lost if that at last is won.

The School
of Life.

If the saints, then, will take the trouble to go to school with sinners, they may learn one or two things at least. But if any man lack wisdom, is he not to ask of God? Would the children of light not be better upon their knees looking up for guidance than making pilgrimages to Vanity Fair to study the ways of its citizens? If they are indeed children of light they will not forget that best of all methods.

A School for Saints

Yet God may scatter answers so thickly that some Luke xvi. of them lie even on the trodden highway. The ^{1-9.} school of the children of this world may seem to provide a strange curriculum for the saints. Some of them might prefer a cloister, some a theological college, some a convention for the deepening of spiritual life. All these schools have their uses. Yet *life* also is a school, even for the holiest, and if we do not at least matriculate there we shall scarcely graduate anywhere else. The only wise God sometimes wishes that His saints were humble enough to learn wisdom even from sinners.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

He that loseth gold, though drosse,
Tells to all he meets his crosse;
He that sins—hath he no losse?

He that finds a silver vein
Thinks on it, and thinks again:
Brings thy Saviour's death no gain?

George Herbert

LXIV

THE TWO MASTERS

"He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own? No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other: or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided Him. And He said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail."—LUKE xvi. 10-17.

Luke xvi.
10-17.

A Corrective
of the
Parable.

WE have already found it wise, in dealing with the parable of the Unjust Steward, not to regard v. 10 as any part of the intended explanation of it. And now vv. 10-12 are most easily understood if we draw a mental line between v. 9 and v. 10 and regard what follows as an entirely new paragraph. Perhaps vv. 1-9 and vv. 10-12 found a place in the same corner of the evangelist's mind or on the same leaf of his notes, because of a certain similarity of theme; but if there is any connection between the two paragraphs, it is that the second comes as a corrective

The Two Masters

of the first. It does not touch the same point but Luke xvi. the very opposite point of many-sided truth. It is 10-17. conceivable that the parable of the Unjust Steward raised the same difficulties then as it raises now. So some phrases are given to us which remind us that while we may learn from the Steward's enterprise, foresight, or power of swift decision, we are not to learn from his dishonesty. That is the last thing the Master means to commend. "He that is faithful in very little" is faithful also when he climbs high upon the shining stairway of prosperity. "He who is unjust in very little" has a rottenness in his character which will make itself felt through all greatnesses and splendours.

There is a point there which is perhaps of special importance in days like our own when it is easy to do things on a big scale, and the fascination of large enterprises carries our hearts captive. We have the feeling that we may throw ourselves into the great undertakings and need not trouble to be careful about the small and near duties. If I advocate the League of Nations abroad, what does it matter if I cannot keep the peace in my own home? If I am benevolent to great causes, what does it matter if some of my money is not cleanly made? Our Lord seems to have felt that the seemingly small fault, the flaw at the nearer end, was apt to send a crack through the whole structure. A man's influence will not in the long run rise higher than what he himself is, and the reality of his being comes out often in the small things even more clearly than in the great.

Small Tests
of Great
Principles.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvi.

10-17.

The thought is turned over to reveal some fresh aspects and implications. "If therefore ye have not been trustworthy in the unrighteous Mammon"—again the proverbial phrase is used, perhaps with a smile as we might speak playfully of "filthy lucre," knowing that it could be put to honest uses after all—"who will *entrust* to you the *true* Riches?" Here an exact rendering is a help to interpretation: the Greek adjective and verb are related very much as our "trustworthy" and "entrust" are related. And if, with Dr Moffatt, we spell Riches with a capital R, it hints that our Lord is already leading His hearers above matters monetary, and is pointing once more at wealth laid up with God. The line of thought is a little like that in 1 John iv. 20: "He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God Whom he hath not seen?" A man is tested among things near and visible and tangible; if he cannot pass the easy test, how can he graduate in the higher School? "And if ye have not been trustworthy in that which is another's"—should we resort to a capital letter again and say Another's? We have nothing that we have not received!—"who shall give you that which is your own?"—your intimate, inalienable, indestructible inheritance. The lesson of the parable of the talents really pervades all these clauses like an atmosphere. Dr Plummer gives the substance of the paragraph with admirable clearness when he says: "The case sketched in these three verses (10-12) is that of a wealthy owner who educates his son for managing the estate to which he is heir, and

The Two Masters

proves his fitness for it by allowing him to have Luke xvi. control of something that is of little value except 10-17. as an instrument for forming and discerning character. If the son proves faithless in this insignificant charge he is disinherited." So must we use even our material belongings as to prove worthy of a better than material heritage.

The lesson crystallises now into the familiar words The Great
Impossibility of v. 13. Let the sheer absoluteness of the words sink slowly into our minds: here is one of the few things which Christ counted among the impossibilities. "No servant can be a slave to two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will hold to the one and despise the other—ye cannot serve God and Mammon." In spite of the absolute statement, there are some people who seem to shape well at the double task and are skilled in making the best of both worlds. But that is only an appearance. The words of Christ remain true. No man can be a slave to two Masters, i.e. have his life at the absolute disposal of more than one authority. The compass needle cannot point in two opposite directions. Either he will love God more and more, until even material possessions become but tools and instruments in that high service. Or else he will love Mammon more and more until, like the man with the muckrake, he has no eye for any crown God may offer or for any angel God may send. John Ruskin has caught the absolute note in Christ's teaching here and has echoed it in modern speech:¹ "If a man fear or reverence God, he must hate

¹ *Fors Clavigera*, Letter LXII.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvi. covetousness ; and if he fear or reverence covetous-
10-17. ness, he must hate God, and there is no intermediate
way whatsoever."

God and The Pharisees now enter once again—always in
Your Hearts. the margin of the picture as we study our Lord's
ministry—sinister, sneering, malevolent. We gain
some information about them here : we are told that
they were covetous. The acid of that phrase bites
more deeply into our remembrance the etched por-
trait of them elsewhere where we are told that they
devoured widow's houses. Let covetousness once get
hold even of a religious man's heart and it will lead
him to all lengths and all depths ! But when they
confronted the clear eyes of the Master, it was the
hour of their judgment : even their jeers could not
shield them from the flaming spear-point of that
scrutiny : they scarcely needed to wait for any day
of doom for the throne to be set and the books to
be opened. " And He said unto them, Ye are they
which justify yourselves before men "—before the
relatives of Mrs Bat's-eyes and Mr Hate-light, easily
deceived by prayers at the street-corner and such
devices of self-advertisement. " But God knoweth
your hearts," and the successful, advertising, surface-
piety which may be highly esteemed among men, is
to God like the abomination of desolation—a temple
profaned and defiled. If these things be so, if men,
if we, are so easily deceived, how can we give up our
hope of a final judgment day, when One who makes
no mistakes shall pass the final verdict and set all
things right ?

Verses 16 and 17 are loosely knit to what has gone

The Two Masters

before : it looks as if some connecting link were lost. Luke xvi. 10-17. Yet after all it is not a long journey from the Pharisees, who built high the fence of the law, to John the Baptist whose ministry marked for Christ the close of an old epoch and the dawning of a better day. "The law and the prophets"—a familiar phrase to summarise the old dispensation, coined perhaps before the third section of the Hebrew Old Testament, the "writings," took canonical shape—"were until John." But now not even the Pharisees with their fanatical zeal and artificial standards can shut the gates of God. "Since that time the Kingdom of God is preached and every one"—Dr Moffatt renders "any one"—"presseth in." If we can read from this distance those pharisaic faces we can guess that here was a new cause of offence to them : yet in that saying "any one presseth in" the joy of Christ's heart shone radiantly for a moment, even amid His solemn and searching warnings. He saw them coming, the nobodies and the anybodies, their poverty their plea, their need their argument, their hunger their guide, to claim for their own what the proud and the self-righteous had cast away. But this implied no contradiction of the true meaning of the law. "It is easier for heaven and earth to pass than for one tittle of the law"—literally one "horn" of one letter—"to fail" of its true fulfilment. For the fulfilment of the law was love, and those who had learned that were pressing in at the doorway in God's ramparts, whilst the rigid traditionalists were shutting themselves into the outer darkness.

It is curious how often in life the love of money

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvi.

10-17

Double
Illusion

and the temptation to unreality go together. Moralists might write much upon that if they would, with history for their armoury of illustration. The rich man is apt to live in an atmosphere of flattery. The self-made man is apt to live in an atmosphere of self-flattery. And the man who is in haste to be rich is at the mercy of a mirage which retreats before him—the delusion that when he achieves only a little more he will have enough to content him for ever. It is not surprising then that “the Pharisees, who were covetous” have also been the by-word of the ages for unreality : they could not see themselves as God saw them, or even as men saw them. He who tries the impossible task of being a slave to two masters is likely to end by being the slave of seven devils. The whole heart is the clean heart. “Unite my heart to fear Thy name.”

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

O my Lord, I beseech Thy Divine Majesty that I may soon be able to leave all such vanities as the praise and blame of men, and seek Thy praise only.

Teresa the Sinner

LXV

CHRIST AND THE FAMILY

"Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery. . . . And they brought unto Him also infants, that He would touch them: but when His disciples saw it, they rebuked them. But Jesus called them unto Him, and said, Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God. Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein."
—LUKE xvi. 18; xviii. 15-17.

WE shall link these two passages together in our Luke xvi. minds for the moment, because in both we have our 18; xviii. Lord's mind on matters intimately affecting the 15-17. family. The connection, if any, between xvi. 18 and The Founda- the preceding verses, is obscure: our Lord had just tion of the Family been speaking of the law, and v. 18 may have been meant to single out a point on which the Pharisees, in spite of all their zeal for the law, were very slack—had not one of their leaders said that a man might divorce his wife if she cooked him an unsatisfactory dinner? The old law of Deut. xxiv. 1 about the "bill of divorcement," originally intended in woman's interest, had been stretched to cover every kind of frivolous excuse for putting a wife away. Dr A. B. Bruce calls us to admire Christ's courage in taking this stand, against the prevailing slackness.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvi.
18 ; xviii.
15-17.

for the fundamental moral law. "It was an act of humanity of immense significance for civilisation, and of rare courage, for He was fighting single-handed against widely-prevalent, long-established opinion and custom." Whether or not v. 18 is meant to be directly related to the preceding argument with the Pharisees, it stands as the Master's conception of the fundamental law regarding the stability and purity of family life: "Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery." The saying is not given identically in all the Evangelists. Hence comes an age-long controversy. St Mark supports this passage in mentioning no exception. St Matthew's version, however, does allow an exception: "Whosoever shall put away his wife, save for uncleanness." The early Christians followed Matthew and admitted the exception, and with it the principle of the dissolubility of marriage in a certain set of circumstances: canon law and the Council of Trent took the other and stricter view, and are followed to-day by many who hold that Christian marriage is sacramental and therefore indissoluble. This is not the place to settle the controversy. But it is questionable whether it is fair to our Lord, to Whom the spirit was so much more than the letter, to make Him an ecclesiastical legislator. He accepted and reiterated the Divine origin of monogamy—the life-long union of one man to one woman; and, whether He meant to legislate or not, His ideal was that this union should never be dissolved except by death.

Christ and the Family

His ideal of Marriage has made the ideal of Luke xvi. Christian civilisation, and it is the loveliest in the ¹⁸; xviii world. One of the characters in Webster's play, ¹⁵⁻¹⁷. *The Duchess of Malfi*, asks the question :

"What do you think of marriage?"

and he gets the reply,

"I take't as those that deny purgatory.
It locally contains or heaven or hell,
There's no third place in't."

One of the ways to make it a hell is to hold it as loosely as some of our modern paganism does : some, if they could, would make it almost as easy for civilised beings to change partners as to change clothes. The first essential in making it a heaven is to accept it, in the spirit of Christ's words, as a contract to be carried out in God's sight and man's, loyally and tenderly, until the end.

If Christ's ideal be clear that does not necessarily imply that it is easy. It cannot be carried through without give and take on both sides—the love that suffereth long and is kind. It cannot be carried through happily without courtesy, as Coventry Patmore tells us in his beautiful poem of wedded love,

The Ideal of
Love and
Loyalty

"'Tis found, and needs it must so be,
That life from love's allegiance flags
When love forgets his majesty
In sloth's unceremonious rags."

The ideal of mutual courtesy, as well as of many other things that are fair and pure, is enshrined in

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvi. the New Testament phrase, "Heirs together of the
18; xviii. grace of life." And in short, it cannot be carried
15-17. through without keeping in love: "the true love-
story commences at the altar," as Robert Louis
Stevenson tells us. There is an old story about
Plutarch the historian. He had some dispute with
his wife's family. She was afraid this might come
between her husband and herself. So the two, at
her suggestion, made a pilgrimage to Mount Helicon,
and there offered a sacrifice to Love, with the prayer
that the bond which bound them together might
never be broken. That story may be pagan in date
and in form, but it is Christian in spirit. The
"putting away" begins in the heart, and for hearts
that are loyally determined to be loyal, bills of
divorcement are not required.

Even Babes 2. It is the easier to pass from this verse about
marriage to the verses in chapter xviii. about chil-
dren because both in Matt. xix. and in Mark x. the
two subjects are in close conjunction. Evidently the
Master, or at least His reporters, thought it a natural
sequence to pass from the one to the other. It is
at xviii. 15 that St Luke, who has been on a long
digression of his own since ix. 51, rejoins the other
Synoptics, and in this lovely, immortal incident his
record is almost identical with the others. "They
brought unto Him even babes"—Dr A. B. Bruce
thinks that in the phrase "even babes" there may
be the faint hint of an apology for the disciples and
their irascibility: not only sick folk were brought,
and lame and blind, and inquirers, and objectors, but
even babes were thrust upon His notice until there

Christ and the Family

seemed no end to the thronging! "They brought Luke xvi. unto Him even babes that He might touch them"—18; xviii. the old sign of benediction. "But when His disciples 15-17. saw it they rebuked them," i.e. those that brought them—it was a waste of the Master's time to take up His attention so! "But Jesus called them"—called the parents or friends whom the disciples had rebuked—"and said. Suffer little children to come unto Me, and forbid them not, for of such is the Kingdom of God." As many commentators from Jerome downwards have pointed out, He does not say "of these" but "of such." The Kingdom is not a monopoly of the children, but its gates are open to all who have the child-heart of trust and of receptiveness. "Verily, I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein."

When an infant was placed once in John Keble's arms, he said, "I delight to look on a human being who has never wilfully offended God." May one not reverently guess that a somewhat similar emotion was welling up in such an hour in the heart of the Master? When we set together the sayings of our Lord about little children, we find that He thought of them in two main lights. He often looked upon them as *teachers and preachers*. It was so the day He set the child¹ in the midst to be to His scheming, ambitious disciples a parable of unpretentious simplicity. That note is here also—the child as teacher, the child as example—"of such is the Kingdom of God." But He also looked upon them as *scholars*,

The Child as
Teacher and
Scholar.

¹ St Matt. xviii. 2.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvi.
18 ; xviii.
15-17.

pilgrims, undeveloped possibilities, the Church's greatest opportunity for good or evil. That opportunity might be used for evil : it was all too possible to " offend one of these little ones which believe in Me " : if the " little ones " in that phrase are not limited to children, they certainly include children. But it might be used for good : " Suffer little children to come unto Me." Older hands could smooth the way, could guide the steps. And the Christian home, founded on Christian marriage, had this for its highest and holiest privilege, to be a porch to the Church—say rather to be an introduction to the Saviour.

It was an incident that made no stir in the world of its day. A passer-by may have smiled in sympathy. The disciples may have been annoyed because their well-meant officiousness was thwarted. The coming of the children to Jesus, the welcome of Jesus to the children, were but as momentary sun-lit ripples upon the great sea of history. Yet did anything ever happen that was ethically more forceful or fruitful ?

Here was the children's charter written in indelible letters because spoken in the Master's indestructible words ; and though no legislature confirmed it, and no world-ruler patronised it, it has been shaping history all through the centuries. To read in such a book as Lecky's *History of European Morals* the story of the child in paganism, with all the horrors and cruelties of abortion, infanticide, exposure—and then to turn to the story of the child within the Christian Church, is to enter a new world, a world

Christ and the Family

of which the Lord Christ Himself is the Creator Luke xvi. and Redeemer. The children may well crown Him 18; xviii. with their praises, even though they cannot realise 15-17. from what He has delivered them.

That strange prophetess of the seventeenth century, Jane Lead, has in her book, *The Ascent to the Mount of Vision*, a vision which God gave her of the children who had died. She saw "a very pleasant flowery and delightful Sphear, with a very wonderful bright Light, that covered it as a Firmament." And in that place of flowers the Angel of the Divine Wisdom took charge, teaching the children the lessons they had not had time in this world to learn. The Angel of Wisdom.

The quaint thought may be true enough: one hopes and believes it is. But one would like to enlarge it, and to believe that from a truly Christian home built even in this low world the Angel of Divine Wisdom is not very far away. He takes the parents into his care, teaching them to restrain temper, and to curb selfishness, and to practise courtesy, and to keep in love with love. And he takes charge of the children also till they learn that in the service of the Lord Christ is their life-long wisdom and peace. If that Angel has ever any time to spare from his duties, may he come to some who are old and hard, proud and sour and cynical, and repeat the word of the Lord who sent him, "Whosoever shall not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child shall in no wise enter therein!" Come it soon, or come it late, education begins when the soul learns that lesson.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvi.
18 ; xviii.
15-17.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

We for our children seek Thy heart,
For them we lift our eyes,
Lord, should their faith in us depart,
Let faith in Thee arise.
When childhood's visions them forsake,
To women grown and men,
Back to Thy heart their hearts Oh, take,
And bid them dream again!

Dr George Macdonald

LXVI

DIVES AND LAZARUS

There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day : And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table : moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom : the rich man also died, and was buried ; And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue ; for I am tormented in this flame. But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things : but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented. And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed : so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot : neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house : For I have five brethren ; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment. Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets ; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham : but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."—LUKE xvi. 19-31.

It is not the purpose of this parable to give information about the geography of the eternal world, the scenery of realms unseen. The mere use of the idea

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvi.
19-31.

A Dialogue
of the Dead.

of "Abraham's bosom" ought to be sufficient warning against an undue literalism in the interpretation of details. That phrase was a familiar one in the speech of the time; and indeed the whole landscape of this parable was shaped along the ordinary lines of popular thought. The Jew, like the Greek, believed in Hades, a shadowy under-world to which good and bad alike must pass when this life was done. After a certain period, roughly contemporaneous with the Book of Daniel, room was made in this belief for moral differentiation; there was, within the general conception of Hades, a paradise for the good, and a penal fire for the wicked. Our Lord takes the thought and language of His own day without change or criticism: He is using it for a dramatic purpose, and for that same purpose He places the two divisions of Hades within speaking distance. Yet the conventional setting of the thought of the parable cannot hide its divine and most amazing originality. It authenticates itself as an utterance of the Master by the acute observation of life which gives us so vivid and contrasted a picture, by the moral intensity which triumphs over all the difficulties of background in making ethical values supreme, and by the subtle impression it gives us of One who is at home among the timeless realities and who has every right to make us overhear this dialogue of the dead.

Rich Man
and Beggar.

1. The picture groups itself in two panels. First, we see the two contrasted types *in this world*. "There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day."

Dives and Lazarus

Here, as in dealing with some of the other parables, Luke xvi. we wonder whether our Lord had a given case in ^{19-31.} mind. But nothing is said to indicate that : doubtless the type was common enough then, as it has been in every civilisation. Further, nothing is said to indicate any special wickedness on the part of this individual : the note even of selfishness is implied rather than expressed. Over against him there is set, at his very gate, so near and yet so far, his social opposite. "There was a certain beggar named Lazarus," one ponders in vain over this name—why did the Master, contrary to His usual custom, name this character ? and why did He choose this special name ?—"a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores." If nothing is said of any special wickedness in the rich man's case, nothing is said here of any special piety : it is his poverty rather than his piety which is thrown into strong relief—his pathetic hunger for the crumbs from the rich man's table, the intensified touch of desolation which is implied in the picture of the dogs licking his sores, as if no human helper cared to comfort and relieve him. There they are painted over against each other, the social problem in a nutshell, types for all time. It is worth while to dwell a moment longer on the reserve with which the story is told—there is no accusation, no argument. The picture is painted and brings its own atmosphere with it. You see the two men, the one in his fine linen, the other in his rags, the one with his sumptuous faring, the other thankful for his broken scraps, and you feel what is implied in their juxtaposition.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvi.
19-31.

Circumstances have altered since this story was told : Dives and Lazarus have changed their appearance and their environment. Yet their essential case is unchanged, and the problem of their relationship is with us still.

Enlarging
Duty

The parable in itself raises nothing more than the question of individual relationship--the wealthy man and his duty to his poorer neighbour. It is surprising how long it took for the problem of poverty to pass beyond that individualistic phase. When Hannah More was busy with her mission of mercy in eighteenth-century England she could write words like these : " We have one large parish of miners so poor that there is not one creature in it that can give a cup of broth if it would save a life. Of course, they have nothing human to look to but us. The clergyman, a poor saint, told me, when we set up our schools there twenty-five years ago, that eighteen had perished that winter of a putrid fever, and he could not raise a sixpence to save a life." Two things are made plain from such an extract. One is that Dives had not become extinct in eighteen centuries : there must have been many wealthy individuals within touching and helping distance of all this mass of misery : there must have been many in whom wealth and piety were blended, but who did not see the social responsibilities of their wealth or the social implications of their piety. The second is that even a philanthropist such as Hannah More has very little conception of getting to the roots of things, or of corporate, still less of preventive, action : schools and doles are her only remedy for

Dives and Lazarus

the ills of Lazarus and his children. That stage has Luke xvi. now gone past. During the recent generations we ^{19-31.} have been hurried past it, and we need not doubt that the hastening has been under the urge of the Spirit of God. We are learning now to seek out causes, and not merely to deal with symptoms. We are learning gradually that prevention is better than cure. We are learning that problems which are beyond the power of individual action, and which indeed individual action may often make worse rather than better, are not beyond the reach of a community which knows how to organise itself helpfully, prudently, and beneficently. It may have quickened our march in these directions that Lazarus is not so passive as he once was. Dr Plummer points out that in the parable Lazarus "never murmurs against God's distribution of wealth nor against the rich man's abuse of it in this world. And in Hades he neither exults over the change of relations between himself and Dives, nor protests against being asked to wait upon him in the place of torment or to go errands for him to the visible world." Lazarus has not always continued in that quiescent mood, and perhaps the fear of Dives for his own plate-glass may have somewhat quickened, if not his conscience, then at any rate his action in regard to Lazarus and all the circumstances of the latter's case. But whatever new motives may be stirring in the modern world, or whatever new methods, corporate or individual, may be needful, the old law holds, to be the motive-power of all endeavour: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Lazarus, in one way

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvi. 19-31. or another, remains the opportunity of Dives—an opportunity which, if unused, turns, as all unused opportunities do, into judgment.

A Vision of the Unseen. 2. The second panel of the painting takes us to *the world unseen*, and there sets the same two figures over against each other once again. The warning may be repeated against building too much on pictorial and parabolic details: the story was not told for its own sake, but for the sake of the great moral and spiritual truths which it enshrines. And looking through it as through a window opened by the Master's hand into that life which is the development and completion of this, what do we see?

(a) We see *the doom of lovelessness*. Wealth cannot buy it off, or postpone it when its hour has struck: there is no wealth left to be coin or counter for such a bargain. In the end of the parable of the unjust steward (v. 9) we have a glimpse of souls who have at least so used their portion of filthy lucre that it has made them friends to welcome them into the unseen. This poor, rich man has no such friends: by a strange paradox of providence, it is Lazarus who finds friends and ministers. It is the same lesson as is contained in another form in St Matthew's Gospel, in the parable of the Sheep and the Goats: "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to Me. And these shall go away . . ." Here we see one of them—gone away to his own place. Perhaps, as love is the crown and completion of the Christian character, lovelessness is the one ultimate sin, the very antipodes of heaven.

Dives and Lazarus

Could it enter, there would be a cloud upon the Luke xvi. radiance, a dissonance in the perfect harmony. ¹⁹⁻³¹.

Therefore

“He that shuts Love out in turn shall be
Shut out from Love, and on her threshold lie
Howling in outer darkness.”

(b) We see *the fixing of character*. Is there not a hint of that in the fact that to Dives, in spite of all the changes of their position and environment, Lazarus is still but a servant, to be sent upon his errands? There is something there much more obstinate and hard to abolish than any mere physical gulf. Everywhere and always, infinite things are possible to true penitence. But the tragedy of the moral life arrives if the soul reaches a point at which penitence itself becomes impossible, and the habits of the moral life become no longer a raiment to be doffed at will, but its bone and sinew, an organic part of itself for ever.

(c) We see *the tendency to find excuse*. This element in the moral life of men our Lord set before us, more fully and openly, in the parable of the wedding-feast. But it is at least suggested here. “Send Lazarus to my father’s house, for I have five brethren, that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.” The implication is that if Dives himself had been adequately warned, he might not have met so unhappy a fate. “Abraham said unto him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets: let them hear them.’” This phrase is often used as if the message alluded to were specially

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvi.
19-31.

in proof of immortality. As a matter of fact, Moses and the prophets have comparatively little on that subject, and if some one did come back from the other world and show himself clearly and unmistakably to men, that would be a proof of immortality which no man could resist. The point at issue here is not immortality, but the sin of the loveless life. Moses and the prophets have their limitations but on that subject they were as full and clear as any honest heart could desire. Deuteronomy, for instance, was a book of law, but even that book of law was very full of love : it was a great lesson in considering the poor, in dealing generously with the helpless, in securing the rights of the stranger and the slave—in short, in many of the ingredients of the humaner outlook. If a human heart was so hard and narrow as not to feel the authority of so old and gracious a lesson, was it likely to revise its standard of values at the bidding of a spectre from the unseen ? Even a miracle might fail to teach a loveless soul that unselfishness was his duty and his joy.

The Law of
Compensa-
tion.

We miss the soul of all this if we miss the profound emotion which filled the heart of Jesus Christ as He surveyed the cruelties and inequalities of the world's life—many of them avoidable, with the exercise of a little love and a little thoughtfulness. Small wonder—life being not only so unjust but so brief !—that He believed in a scheme of counterbalance and compensation, working itself out in a region where man's selfishness cannot interfere with it nor his ignorance darken it. Here in this world's imperfect arrangements, He saw the fixing of character

Dives and Lazarus

and the forging of destiny : beyond, in God's great Luke **xvi.** sequel, He saw destiny revealing itself, and the **19-31.** righting of this world's wrongs, and the harvest of this life's sowing. Where He takes this line, is He not preaching salvation by works ? Is He not contradicting the Gospel which we commonly associate with His gracious Name—of salvation by faith ? Even faith must be tested, and the test of a true faith is that it works by love. We are told elsewhere that a faith which does not pass this test is "dead, being alone." Dives, then, however orthodox, however eminent, however self-satisfied, is dead among his splendours, a corpse of a man, his purple and fine linen the shroud of a soul's decay. It is no accident that He Who came as the Lord of Love came also to give men life and to give it more abundantly.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Self is the only prison that can ever bind the
soul ;

Love is the only angel who can bid the gates
unroll ;

And when he comes to call thee, arise and follow
fast :

His way may lie through darkness, but it leads
to light at last.

Henry Van Dyke

LXVII

BROTHERS, BELIEVERS, SERVANTS

"Then said He unto the disciples, It is impossible but that offences will come: but woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea, than that he should offend one of these little ones. Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him. And if he trespass against thee seven times in a day, and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou shalt forgive him. And the apostles said unto the Lord, Increase our faith. And the Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye might say unto this sycamine tree, Be thou plucked up by the root, and be thou planted in the sea; and it should obey you. But which of you, having a servant plowing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, Go and sit down to meat? And will not rather say unto him, Make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink? Doth he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I trow not. So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all those things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants: we have done that which was our duty to do."—LUKE xvii. 1-10.

Luke xvii.
1-10.

ONCE more the synoptic problem presses itself upon us, in the question as to what brought together in this paragraph phrases and sentences which in the other Gospels are scattered through other contexts. But for our purpose it will again be best to leave that problem to the critical commentaries, or even bid

Brothers, Believers, Servants

it take care of itself as it is the way of insoluble **Luke xvii.** problems to do. The Master's thoughts are precious **1-10.** in whatever context they are set, in whatever sequence they come. And we may find a path through the passage if we notice that He is here dealing with His disciples first as brothers, then as believers, then as servants.

1. The maxims of brotherly conduct begin with **Brotherly Love.** the solemn and mournful words, "It is impossible but that offences will come." How true this was the Master knew when He looked at life. For the moment, His expression of the fact almost sounds like fatalism; but if He had meant to be merely fatalistic, there would have been no logical place for the warning that followed: "Woe unto him, through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and be cast into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble." We tremble before the sternness of words like these, inexorable in their severity: and yet at the same time we adore their tenderness—this care for even one of the little ones of God, whether the reference be to a child, or to a soul weak in faith, easily bewildered and perplexed. The general necessity of offences cannot be a shield for the conduct of any soul who so far forgets the law of brotherliness as to put stumbling-blocks in a brother's way. A great deal of positive evil has crept into the world under shelter of the somewhat negative doctrine that offences are unavoidable. Ruskin tells us¹ that it is no wonder that sometimes

¹ *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, Chapter 1.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvii. 1-10. "the too cold calculation of our powers should reconcile us too easily to our shortcomings, and even lead us into the fatal error of supposing . . . that the necessity of offences renders them inoffensive." We all need to learn that lesson that the necessity of offences does not render them inoffensive. The "necessity of offences" may roll like a great stone through the ages, but it does not move unless human hands smooth its path, or human carelessness open the breach through which it crashes. "Take heed to yourselves," the Master says in this connection, for the opening words of v. 3 are probably the driving home of the lesson of v. 2. Probably an evil example is set more often through mere heedlessness than through sheer wilfulness: yet heedlessness may set in motion forces which it cannot control, and which may involve the innocent as well as the guilty. The wise man not only takes heed to himself: he asks the Saviour to keep his feet—then he can say, even to the little ones, as Paul said, "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ."

Forgiveness
and Peni-
tence.

The lesson of brotherliness goes far beyond the mere avoidance of offences: it should be a surging tide of generosity that knows no high-water mark. "If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him." That is worth noting: it is sometimes forgotten. Christian forgiveness is sometimes spoken of in such an easy-going way that it seems to ignore the rights and wrongs of the case, but that is an unfair presentment of it. To carry out these counsels in their entirety, one would need the sternness of a prophet combined with the tenderness of an evangelist.

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“Rebuke him: and, *if he repent*, forgive him.” Luke xvii.
The words, “if he repent,” deserve an underlining. I-10.

Again here is something that is often forgotten in the sickly sentimental variety of Christian ethic which flows fluently enough from foolish tongues. There is much about forgiveness in the New Testament, both about the forgiveness of God and that of man, but probably in no case is the forgiveness intended to be out of relation to the repentance of the guilty. To have it otherwise would cheapen the holy gift until it became despicable: a forgiveness which did not depend upon repentance would demoralise society and dethrone the Holiness of God. But if the sinner does not get off without repentance, the disciple in the school of love must not think that there is no real demand upon him. His lesson and task may reveal unexpected depths and heights. “If he trespass against thee seven times in a day”—this is not meant to cancel the eighth and ninth and tenth times: it is a glimpse of a love which will go all lengths in generosity—“and seven times in a day turn again to thee, saying, I repent; thou”—always, as in v. 3, on the supposition of his penitence being sincere—“shalt forgive him.” It is a hard lesson: perhaps a living instance is the best comment. Edward Fitzgerald wrote to Alfred Tennyson:¹ “I read Hayley’s *Life of Romney* the other day: Romney wanted but education and reading to make him a very fine painter, but his ideal was not high and fine. How touching is the

¹ See *Alfred, Lord Tennyson, a Memoir*, II., p. 366

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvii. 1-10 close of his life! He married at nineteen, and because Sir Joshua and others had said that marriage spoilt an artist, almost immediately left his wife in the North, and never saw her till the end of his life, when old, nearly mad, and quite desolate, he went back to her and she received him and nursed him till he died. This quiet act of hers is worth all Romney's pictures, even as a matter of art, I am sure." The moral worth of such an act might well be taken as the equivalent of the "seven times" of this passage, or even of the "seventy times seven" of the parallel passage in St Matthew. If our narrow bitter hearts are to rise to the height of such a lesson, whether presented in precept or in example, they have need to be baptised into the patience and mercy of God.

Believing
Optimism.

2. He who would be a brother in this large sense and to the extent of this demand must needs be a great *believer*, an optimist to the very core of his being. It would be a forced interpretation to say that this is the intentional collocation of these verses, but it is the almost inevitable reflection as the eye passes from v. 4 to v. 5. In two other settings are sayings of this kind recorded, after the healing of the demoniac boy (St Matt. xvii. 20) and after the withering of the fig-tree (St Mark xi. 23). Yet perhaps a life of genuine forgiving love needs as much faith as the task of healing the evils of humanity or the task of withering the abuses of society. But our Lord is very emphatic in declaring that, given such faith, all things, in the one realm as in the other, are possible. "The apostles said unto the Lord "

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—a not very frequent phrase which sufficiently Luke xvii. suggests the majesty of Him who could bestow this 1-10. and all other gifts: "Increase our faith."¹ Has any disciple-liturgy from that day to this been able to do without that petition? It is faith that makes us all that we are; yet it is to the reality of faith that we are always struggling to attain; and those who seem nearest to graduation in this school will confess most readily that they are not beyond the alphabet. It is to this mood that the Master seems to wish to bring the disciples. "The Lord said, If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed"—so small, if it be only the real thing!—"Ye might say unto this mulberry tree, Be thou plucked up by the root and be thou planted in the sea, and it should obey you." The mere fact that in the parallel passages it is a "mountain" and not a "tree" that is moved is a reminder that the spirit of Christ's teaching is more than the letter. But either way the same thing shines out upon us, the Master's glowing conviction that to the soul who takes hold upon the promises and help of God nothing is impossible. Are our hearts too cold to catch fire at that conviction? What can we do but echo the disciples' litany, "Lord, give us more faith"?

3. Those who are brothers and believers are also, *Willing* in another aspect, *servants*, and the Master gives *Service.* them a lesson in the etiquette of the Heavenly Court at which they serve. Here is a brief parable of service, and it is important to notice what it does *not* teach and what it does. This cannot be

¹ Perhaps better "Give us more faith" (Moffatt).

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvii.
1-10.

better put than in the words of Dr A. B. Bruce :
“ Christ’s purpose is not to teach in what spirit God deals with His servants, but to teach rather in what spirit we should serve God.” Our Lord takes a not unfamiliar scene from the life of an ordinary farmhouse in the Palestine of His day. The servant is out ploughing or shepherding. When he comes in at eventide, before his day’s task is done, he has still his master’s table to set and his master’s needs to serve. It is only after this that he sits down to his own repast. There was nothing novel or controversial in this : it was the accepted routine of an ordinary household. Now the employer in the parable need not be taken as a picture of God : God is not so ungracious as the conventional employer : Christ takes other opportunities of showing how generous the Father is in His bounty and how urgent in His love. But the servant’s acceptance of the position may well be a parable and a pattern for those who are called to a higher service. “ So likewise ye, when ye shall have done all these things which are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants : we have done that which was our duty to do.”

The Bugle
Call.

Duty !—is it a grim, grey word, cold, hard, inhospitable ! If there be music in it, it is the harsh music of the bugle, suggesting discipline rather than delight. It is a word which associates itself more with the hours when we are busy and burdened than with those when we are glad. Yet he who wants happiness must not be afraid of the sound of this word nor of the stern call which lies within it. One

Brothers, Believers, Servants

important manuscript, which some of our modern Luke xvii. scholars have followed, omits the word "unprofit-^{1-10.} able" in this verse, and reads simply, "we are servants." We had better accept that position and all that it implies, thanking God for One Who is not only Master but Friend. We cannot do even our duty as we ought to do it except in His fellowship. And when our duty is accomplished, we shall have Him for our exceeding great reward.

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

There is something truly infinite in duty : it is a region that can never be enclosed ; we pitch our tent upon its boundary-field, and as we survey it, we detect an ampler realm beyond.

James Martineau

LXVIII

WHERE ARE THE NINE?

"And it came to pass, as He went to Jerusalem, that He passed through the midst of Samaria and Galilee. And as He entered into a certain village, there met him ten men that were lepers, which stood afar off: And they lifted up their voices, and said, Jesus, Master, have mercy on us. And when he saw them, he said unto them, Go shew yourselves unto the priests. And it came to pass, that, as they went, they were cleansed. And one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, and with a loud voice glorified God, And fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks: and he was a Samaritan. And Jesus answering said, Were there not ten cleansed? but where are the nine? There are not found that returned to give glory to God, save this stranger. And He said unto him, Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath made thee whole."—LUKE xvii. 11-19.

Luke xvii. 11-19. WE are still on that wonderful journey to Jerusalem, which seems to hold endless fascination for this evangelist. "It came to pass as he went to Jerusalem." The chronology is vague. The geography is equally indistinct, except for an occasional phrase such as this: "He passed between Samaria and Galilee," i.e. along the border line that divided the two districts. It has been conjectured that He was moving eastward towards Perea, so as not to cross Samaritan territory but to come east of Jordan by the route which Jews most frequented. This would explain the mixture in the group of lepers that met Him: some from the Jews and one at least from the

Where are the Nine?

Samaritans, they felt themselves exiled from their own people, and maintained a dubious citizenship upon the no-man's-land of the border. Dr Plummer mentions that in the leper-houses of modern Jerusalem Jews and Moslems mix together, differences abolished by a common misfortune: in this story of long ago, the same common misery had healed the feud of many generations.

The story is very simply and briefly told. St Luke has already described (v. 12-14) the cleansing of one leper: here he hurries on until he reaches the point which specially attracts him. As Christ entered into a certain village, "there met Him ten men that were lepers," a group arresting in number as well as in need—"which stood afar off." The law prescribed distance. Is there any more pathetic picture in the Old Testament than that which the Levitical law gives of the leper (Lev. xiii. 45)?—"the leper in whom the plague is, his clothes shall be rent, and his head bare, and he shall put a covering upon his upper lip, and shall cry, Unclean, unclean." The cry was for warning, that healthy folk might keep at a distance; it did not cross the imagination of the ancient law-giver that one day that bitter cry might turn into a prayer, a prayer not without hope. Here was a strange modulation in the lepers' cry, when they not only "lifted up their voices," as they were well accustomed to do, but ventured on a prayer such as they had never dared address before to any passer-by, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." Had the leper of chapter v. spread the news of his recovery among the leper fraternity? and did this account

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvii. 11-19. for the gathering together of so large a company, and for the eager hopefulness of their prayer? "And when He saw them, He said unto them, Go, shew yourselves to the priests"—presumably each of them to the ecclesiastical authority most convenient for his own district. "And it came to pass that, as they went"—they must have heard ere this of the Master's power and grace, or they would not have been likely to yield such instant obedience—"as they went, they were cleansed." "Unclean, unclean!"—the hoarse and dreadful cry faded from their lips: it was needed no more—they were cleansed!

A Stranger's
Courtesy

We come now to what specially intrigues the heart of the evangelist, and what gives this incident a character and colour of its own. "One of them, when he saw that he was healed"—had his flesh, like that of Naaman, become as that of a little child?—"turned back." It was a work of super-erogation now to show himself to the priest: in any case that could wait: he had more urgent business with his Deliverer, and the courtesy of gratitude turned him round upon his path. "He turned back, and with a loud voice"—the very voice that had been accustomed to moan out "Unclean, unclean" but was now strangely tuned to a happier song—"with a loud voice glorified God, and fell down on his face at His feet, giving Him thanks." It is all very moving and very fascinating, but here is the phrase for which the evangelist has been preparing the way, and which he would underline for our special attention. "*And he was a Samaritan.*" St Luke is the evangelist for the Gentiles, and he has a special

Where are the Nine?

eye not only towards the Master's pity for the out- Luke xvii.
sider but towards any good quality that the outsider ^{11-19.}
can show. What follows is the underscoring and
embellishing of this same point. "Jesus answering
said, Were there not ten cleansed?"—He knew well
that there were ten and that they had been cleansed,
but He spoke within earshot of listening onlookers,
and He would waken their hearts and consciences to
take home the lesson—"Were there not ten cleansed?
but where are the nine? There are not found that
returned to give glory to God, save *this stranger*." That
word also is worth dwelling upon. The Jewish
law is full of things that the "stranger" might not
do and might not have. The passover was not for
him: "there shall no stranger eat thereof." The
sacrifice of consecration was not for him: "they
shall eat these things wherewith the atonement was
made, to consecrate and to sanctify them, but a
stranger shall not eat thereof, because they are holy."
The holy oil was not for him: "Whosoever putteth
any of it upon a stranger shall even be cut off from
his people."¹ When we turn from these prohibitions
to this gentle utterance of the Master, we hear a
new accent: we are in the presence of a new revela-
tion. "This stranger"—when the man heard this
phrase used so tenderly of himself, did he not hear
within it a welcome and a benediction, the word of
exclusion turned into the word of pity? Heaping
kindness upon kindness, grace upon grace, Jesus said
to him, "Arise, go thy way: thy faith hath saved
thee." And in those words, which must have

¹ See Exod. xii. 13; xxix. 33; xxx. 33.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xviii. 11-19. haunted his heart to his dying day, the man had a rich reward for his return.

Man's
Narrow
Heart.

The whole world of men is in that leper band. The nine in their ingratitude and forgetfulness have still their many comrades. There is said to be no gratitude in politics, but the besetting sin of politicians is not confined to them—it spreads through many a rank and walk of life. It is said that there is less gratitude in the world than there used to be. “Can any one deny,” Dr John Watson asked, “that the sense of debt to those who have rendered service either to our people or ourselves has weakened? Has it not come to this, that in the past men hated their enemies and loved their friends, but now we forgive our enemies and forget our friends?” It is easy, terribly easy, to forget the Best of all friends: perhaps that was why He said, “This do in remembrance of Me.” And at many a point in life one seems to hear His “Where are the nine?” re-echoing like a sigh. Take any street in civilisation on a Sunday morning—the one goes to God’s house to pay his vows, the nine stay at home or go out upon their pleasure. Take the well-to-do people of any Christian community: it is the one here and there who seems to feel the responsibility of giving, praying, sacrificing: it is the nine who take things as easily as if their redemption had been cheaply bought. And there are some who turn their faces towards Christ and are rich in vows and promises so long as their trouble is upon them: once their deliverance comes, their faces are turned in another direction and they are as forgetful as the nine in the story.

Where are the Nine?

John Owen tells in one of his sermons what he calls **Luke xvii.** the "ridiculous story" of a mariner who in a storm **11-19.** at sea vowed to the Virgin a wax candle as big as the mast of his ship, but when he came on shore paid his vow with one of the twelve-to-the-pound variety. And the wise Puritan adds: "Let not the moral of that fable be found in any of you. . . . There is no greater discovery of an hypocritical frame than to flatter the Lord in trouble and decline upon deliverance in cold blood."

But the one grateful stranger has also his com- **The Grateful**
rades and his followers. In the evangelical piety of **Fellowship.** a century or more ago, much was made of gratitude as a basis for holy and obedient living. It was said of Wilberforce that he used to carry about, to have beside him in prayer and meditation, a list of the things for which he wanted to give thanks to God. But indeed all true piety, of every sect and school, includes this note: if it were omitted, the very stones would cry out. Psalmists and apostles lead the chorus, and redeemed souls of all the ages join the grateful confession of those who remember and cannot forget the goodness of their God. That is a fine story of the Venerable Bede.¹ "His brother monks, knowing his weakness, and the many claims of work that pressed upon his time, urged him not always to attend the singing of the canonical hours in church. 'I know,' he answered, 'that the angels are with us at those hours: what if they find not me there among the brethren? Will they not say, Where is Bede?' " Yes, it is better to be with the

¹ W. H. Hutton, *The English Saints*, p. 204.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvii. one than with the nine, and some day the grateful
11-19. minority shall have grown into a great multitude
which no man can number, who shall cry with a
loud voice, saying, "Salvation to our God which
sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb."

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

Heal us, Emmanuel, here we are,
Waiting to feel Thy touch :
Deep-wounded souls to Thee repair,
And, Saviour, we are such.

The Olney Hymns

LXIX

THE VIGIL OF LOYAL HEARTS

"And when He was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, He answered them and said, The kingdom of God cometh not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you. And He said unto the disciples, The days will come, when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man, and ye shall not see it. And they shall say to you, See here; or, see there: go not after them, nor follow them. For as the lightning, that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven, shineth unto the other part under heaven; so shall also the Son of Man be in His day. But first must He suffer many things, and be rejected of this generation. And as it was in the days of Noe, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man. They did eat, they drank, they married wives, they were given in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, and the flood came, and destroyed them all. Likewise also as it was in the days of Lot; they did eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; But the same day that Lot went out of Sodom it rained fire and brimstone from heaven, and destroyed them all. Even thus shall it be in the day when the Son of Man is revealed. In that day, he which shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot's wife. Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it. I tell you, in that night there shall be two men in one bed; the one shall be taken, and the other shall be left. Two women shall be grinding together; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Two men shall be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left. And they answered and said unto Him, Where, Lord? And He said unto them, Wheresoever the body is, thither will the eagles be gathered together."—LUKE xvii. 20-37.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvii.
20-37.

Divine
Methods in
History.

IF the Pharisees had put their question to themselves instead of to Christ, and had started upon an investigation of history in order to find the answer, they might very easily have learned two things about God's way of working in His world. They might have seen that He works partly by way of gentle evolution, partly by way of sudden cataclysm. An instance of the former kind out of their own nation's history would have been the rise of prophecy. There was nothing startling about it. It came quietly without calling attention to itself. It was a new pulse in the nation's life but a new pulse in an old artery: "he that is now called a Prophet was beforetime called a Seer." So quietly and unpretentiously dawned a great day for Israel, a day the light of which did not fade but merged in the day of Christ. An instance of the latter kind would have been that strange baptism of cleansing through which the nation passed when their Holy City was destroyed, and they themselves were driven off into the Babylonian exile, and idolatry was purged from them for ever. That doom had long been rumbling on the horizon—a thunderstorm drawing nearer occasionally and then removing itself again, but seeming to come, when at last it did come, with the swiftness of the lightning flash, or of the flood, or of the brimstone-rain. History is the inter-twining of these two elements, the quiet infusion of new life, the sudden rolling-up of old institutions.

The Pharisees put their question to the Master, and what He said partly to them and partly to the disciples, was in effect that answer.

The Vigil of Loyal Hearts

1. "He was demanded of the Pharisees when the Kingdom of God should come." Did they question Him honestly?—there were honest men even among the Pharisees. Or did they merely seek to entrap Him, hoping to entangle Him in some definite prophecy which events would quickly disprove? At any rate there is no sign of resentment in the answer. "He answered them and said, The Kingdom of God cometh not with observation." That phrase is difficult to translate: to use Dr A. B. Bruce's antithesis, it may mean either "with visibility" or "with predictability." Probably the former is the preferable shade of meaning: Dr Moffatt renders by a round-about phrase, "The Reign of God is not coming as you hope to catch sight of it." "Neither shall they say, Lo, here! or lo there!" as though they were indicating some visible object which could be fitted into the landscape. Then follows a much-discussed phrase, which with equal correctness may be given either of two meanings—"behold, the Kingdom of God is *within* you," or "the Kingdom of God is *among* you." There is no parallel passage to guide us, this utterance being peculiar to St Luke's record, and there is good Greek precedent for both interpretations. "Within you" may seem to correspond best to the idea of the Kingdom not being geographically located, but it is open to the objection that our Lord was not likely to say this to Pharisees, at any rate to insincere Pharisees who were out to ensnare Him. And perhaps, though it is a departure from a familiar cadence, it is best to read "the Kingdom of God is among you"—the glorious reign

Luke xvii.

20-37.

The Kingdom
Invisible.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvii. 20-37. was already there in the lives of the Master Himself and His loyal disciples. Thus we would have a Lucan parallel to the Johannine saying, "There standeth One among you whom ye know not."

The Kingdom in the Soul. Yet the two interpretations are not mutually exclusive. If the Kingdom was already *among* the society of that day, an indefinable but most real quantity, it was so because there were in that society some souls in whom it was dwelling and ruling. The mystics have delighted much to dwell on this 21st verse; they have found abysses within their own souls and those abysses filled with God. Perhaps the classical case is the story of Madame Guyon and her visit to a certain monk-confessor. "He was a long time without being able to speak to me. I knew not to what to attribute his silence. I continued to speak to him, and to tell him in a few words my difficulties about prayer. He answered me at once, 'It is, Madame, because you seek outside what you have within. Accustom yourself to seek God in your heart, and you will find Him there.' On finishing these words he left me. The next morning he was very greatly astonished when I went to see him, and when I told him the effect his words had produced in my soul, for it is true they were for me like an arrow that pierced my heart through and through. I felt in that moment a very deep wound, so delicious, so full of love, a wound so sweet I desired never to be healed of it. Those words put into my heart what I was seeking so many years, or rather, they made me discover what was there, which I did not enjoy for want of knowing it. O

The Vigil of Loyal Hearts

my Lord, You were in my heart, and You asked Luke xvii. from me only a simple turning inward to make me ^{20-37.} feel Your presence. O Infinite Goodness, You were so near ! And I went running here and there to look for You, and I did not find You. . . . Alas ! I was seeking You where You were not, and I did not seek You where You were. It was for want of understanding those words of Your Gospel, where You say, ' The Kingdom of God is not here or there, but the Kingdom of God is within you.' ”¹ If the exegesis of Madame Guyon's confessor, which came so like a revelation to her soul, was wrong, it was only slightly wrong. The Kingdom of God is a real thing among human society because it is a real thing in the souls of the people of Christ, spreading like the leaven, sanitary like the salt, radiant like the light.

“ Through such souls alone
God stooping shows sufficient of His light
For us i' the dark to rise by. And we rise.”

2. In the verses that follow, addressed to His disciples, the sterner, more apocalyptic note comes back into the voice of the Master, and the thunders of judgment begin once more to roll through His message. It would scarcely be honest to conceal the difficulties of interpretation which arise not so much from the passage itself as from a comparison of it with the parallel passages. But the main elements in the message stand out clearly enough.

The ground-tone of the passage is a summons to endurance, but to the endurance not of chill despair but of glowing hope—

¹ Autobiography, English trans., I, p. 65 t.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvii.
20-37.

“For all the past, read true, is prophecy,
And all the firsts are hauntings of some Last,
And all the springs are flash-lights of one Spring.”

“The days will come”—so this window into the future opens to the disciples’ awe-stricken gaze—“when ye shall desire to see one of the days of the Son of Man”—not one of the laborious days of the past but one of the promised days of glory and triumph—“and ye shall not see it”: your task will be to endure, to lift up your hearts and endure! That time of endurance will not be without its temptations: “they shall say to you, See here, or See there,” bidding you follow marsh-fires that go out into the darkness—“go not after them, nor follow them.” When the Son of Man comes there will be no mistaking His advent and no hiding of it. “As the lightning that lighteneth out of the one part under heaven shineth unto the other part under heaven, so shall also the Son of Man be” when His great day of triumph dawns. Yet immediately the challenge to endurance returns: “first must He suffer many things and be rejected of this generation”: the cross comes before the crown, the corn of wheat falling into the ground and dying before the day of the abundant harvest, and the disciples must brace themselves to wait with their Master as well as to wait for Him.

The Hour
that shall
Sunder

The clear analysis of Dr Plummer may be quoted as an introduction to what follows: “Having told the disciples that the Son of Man will not come as soon as they wish (v. 22), in what way He will not come (v. 23), in what way He will come (v. 24), and

The Vigil of Loyal Hearts

what will happen first (v. 25), Christ now states in Luke xvii. what condition the human race will be when He comes." Two parallels are drawn from ancient history—the days of Noah and the days of Lot. In each case the sequence of breathless, hurrying verbs in the imperfect tense is very impressive—"they were eating, drinking, marrying, and being married"—"they were eating, drinking, buying, selling, planting, and building"—so Dr Moffatt renders the sequence. They were given up to these things, and when the Son of Man is unveiled, His day shall find men absorbed in the ordinary occupations, as if there were nothing beyond and nothing above. The lesson of vv. 31-33 is that in such an hour material and earthly ties will seem very small: the property-owner may forget his property: the lingerer may well remember the supreme Old Testament example of lingering: the man whose life is surrendered is the man whose life is saved. For that hour shall sunder like a sword when it comes, and out of the closest intimacies the Lord shall choose His own. In a night-scene—two men in one bed: in a day-scene,¹ two women grinding at one handmill—we are allowed to see the fateful sundering. "He that is unjust, let him be unjust still: and he which is filthy let him be filthy still; and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still; and he that is holy, let him be holy still. And, behold, I come quickly; and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be."

If the Pharisees had asked *When*, the disciples

Vultures of
Doom

¹ The best MSS. omit v. 36 entirely.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xvii. 20-37. asked *Where*—"Where, Lord?" He would only give them a general answer, "Wheresoever the carcase is, thither will the vultures be gathered together." There is something in the quiet sombre words which makes vivid the uncanny gathering of the birds of prey, as they are said to have gathered to Delhi in 1858, or to Sebastopol, during the Crimean War, or to Messina after the great earthquake. Did His anxious, loving heart see then the judgments of God hovering like great birds of doom over Jerusalem, and did His gaze pierce history, seeing many corruptions of evil needing to be cleansed by many sanitary judgments? We can have little doubt that this was what He saw. It was a sombre ending to the lesson. Yet we shall not forget that the true end and climax is not the gathering of the vultures, but the unveiling of the Son of Man. And we shall lift up our heads and our hearts, as those who know that tribulations and judgments pass, but His Kingdom is an everlasting Kingdom and His dominion endureth throughout all generations.

FOR MEDITATION AND 'THANKSGIVING

I do hear
From the revolving year
A voice which cries :
 " All dies ;
Lo ! how all dies ! O seer,
And all things too arise ;
All dies, and all is born ;
But each resurgent morn, behold, more near the
 Perfect Morn ! " *Francis Thompson*

LXX

THE JUDGE AND THE WIDOW

"And He spake a parable unto them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint; Saying, There was in a city a judge, which feared not God, neither regarded man: And there was a widow in that city; and she came unto him, saying, Avenge me of mine adversary. And he would not for a while: but afterward he said within himself, Though I fear not God, nor regard man; Yet because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest by her continual coming she weary me. And the Lord said, Hear what the unjust judge saith. And shall not God avenge His own elect, which cry day and night unto Him, though He bear long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless when the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?"—LUKE xviii. 1-8.

It is *an aspect of things* which is reflected in this Luke xviii. parable, the world not as it really is but as it sometimes looks. *There are times when things look as black as they possibly can.* Now with that thought in our minds let us turn to the story. Nobody could be much more of a villain than this Judge. He had no religion—he feared not God. He had no humanity—he regarded not man. He was frankly cynical in all his works and ways. And nobody could be much more helpless than the Widow. She was poor, so she could not bribe. She was weak, so she could not compel. She was incarnate helplessness. It is a queer kind of world which puts the second of these

How the
World looks

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xviii. two figures into the power of the first. But that is
1-8. the kind of world it very often seems to be. Sometimes things seem to be just about as bad as they can be, and the universe seems to be ruled not by the God of the promises but by the Devil of all the delays.

**Two Vivid
Characters.**

The Judge and the Widow are worth a second look for their own sakes. As characters they are as clearly drawn as any in our Lord's parables, and that with no waste of words. A Judge who feared not God nor regarded man was probably not an uncommon type of Eastern official: it has been the glory of British administration in India and in Egypt that it has taught this type of person that there was somebody and something to be feared. Further, "he said within himself, I fear not God nor regard man." He may have been a villain but he was not a hypocrite. Had a friend taxed him with his misdeeds he would have admitted them with a grin or a scowl according to the mood of the moment. Possibly with a grin, for according to one rendering his Honour is pleased to be humorous. "Because this widow troubleth me, I will avenge her, lest at last she come and take her fists to me." His jovial mood is uppermost, and he will have his little jest at the widow's expense. Gallio in the Book of Acts might have been his brother. His ideal of life and work was to get through with as little trouble as possible. As for the Widow herself, she is sketched in more slightly but very clearly. A widow in that land and time was the symbol of all helplessness, all weakness; she was a prey to every form of injustice. Nevertheless

The Judge and the Widow

this widow was not entirely without weapons : she had a tongue and she had perseverance and she knew how to use them both. With an official of this type, when bribery and brute force were both impossible, the only method of warfare left was sheer, shrill-voiced pertinacity, the method of the mosquito and of many other small animals which in spite of their weakness can cause a good deal of discomfort to creatures much stronger than themselves. The widow followed this method till she won her case. Luke xviii. 1-8.

But let it be emphasised that these two vivid figures do not stand here for themselves alone. The intertwining of these two personalities into this little story represents an aspect of things—a look that the universe sometimes wears. It is a universe in which a righteous cause seems often to be as weak as the widow, and brute obstinacy to be as strong as the judge. And even when men believe in a day of reckoning, that day is so long postponed that they grow weary with waiting.

1. We must remember first that *our Lord knew well what this aspect of things was like*. This parable is His knowledge crystallised. He knew how the purpose of God could tarry. He knew how indifferent the heavens above and the hard earth below could look to the plea of a good cause. He knew how the cry of the humble could be met by the scorn of the proud. The Church was to know it soon : we may read her later knowledge, if we will, into the prayer of the souls under the altar :¹ “How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost Thou not judge and avenge our God's Delays.

¹ Rev. vi. 10.

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xviii. 1-8. blood on them that dwell on the earth ? ” But the Master knew it before His Church did. We all have our experience of this aspect of the universe—moods and circumstances in which the whole scheme of things seems hard, unjust, and even full of mockery. Newman said that it was as if he had looked into a mirror and had not seen his face, when he looked into the world and saw “ no reflexion of its Creator.” And we too pray sometimes to “ that inverted bowl we call the sky,” and it seems as if we prayed in vain. In such moments, we, being in sympathy with this poor widow, take her by the hand and sit with her in her low estate, wondering why the times are so out of joint and why God governs so strangely.

The Throne
that Abides

2. But though our Lord knew this order of experience full well, He seemed to be *sure of Some One behind and above*. We, the creatures of space and time, are sorely baffled by the riddles which belong to time and space ; but He had a “ fourth dimension ” of His own along which He felt His way to the eternal realities. His favourite argument of the “ how much more ” is wrapped up with the whole structure of the story.¹ Indeed the “ how much more ” is twice implied. If an unjust judge will relent at last, merely to save himself trouble, how much more may God—perfect Justice, perfect Love—be expected to act considerately. And further, if a judge will relent at last to one in whom he has no special interest, how much more will God be true to

¹ The “ how much more ” is employed even more visibly in chapter xi. 11–13. There the reference seems specially to the individual need ; here to the fortunes of the Christian fellowship.

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those on whom His love is set!—"Shall not God Luke xviii. avenge His own elect?" He is very sure of God. 1-8.

I tell you, He says: as though He would say, Even if nobody else tells you; even if the message be hard to spell out and hard to believe, even if you have to wait long for its confirmation and vindication, I tell you that God is and that He reigns, and you must rest upon My Word! "I tell you that He will avenge them *suddenly*," for probably the shade of meaning here is "suddenly" rather than "speedily." That was a favourite thought of the Master's, which entered into many a word of warning and of hope. He believed in and loved the old prophetic doctrine of the day of the Lord. The Herods, the Caesars, the Unjust Judges of the world have their day, and their day passes. Their sunset hour is fixed. The hour tarries long, but at last it comes on rapid, flaming wings, and the God who has hidden Himself so long flashes forth in judgment and in mercy.

3. And He has *a method for those who are still* Yet, I will *wrestling with the problem of the Divine delays.* They Pray. are "always to pray." John Bunyan tells us in *Grace Abounding* how he learnt this lesson from this very passage. He took the first verse as a message from God to his soul—a message that seemed to encourage him to prayer. "Then the tempter laid again at me very sore, suggesting that neither the mercy of God nor yet the blood of Christ did at all concern me. nor could they help me for my sin, therefore it was in vain to pray. 'Yet,' thought I, 'I will pray.' 'But,' said the tempter, 'your sin is

St Luke xii.—xviii.

Luke xviii. unpardonable.' 'Well,' said I, 'I will pray.' 'It is to no boot,' said he. 'Yet,' said I, 'I will pray.' So I went to prayer to God, and while I was at prayer, I uttered words to this effect: 'Lord, Satan tells me that neither Thy mercy nor Christ's blood is sufficient to save my soul. Lord, shall I honour Thee most by believing Thou wilt and canst, or him, by believing Thou neither wilt nor canst? Lord, I would fain honour Thee by believing Thou wilt and canst.' " We do well not to depart from that line of quest whether our trouble, like Bunyan's, be with our inward guilt and sin, or whether it be with our difficulties and perplexities regarding the mysteries of eternal providence. *Yet, I will pray*, said Bunyan. And if we make the same resolve and hold by it, then, whatever problems have to tarry for fuller light, we shall keep alive in our souls the assurance that God lives and that He reigns. In His own time He will bring forth judgment unto victory. Meantime we walk by faith, not by sight.

**The Shielded
Flame.**

The closing question, "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on the earth?" has an almost despairing sound about it which is not common in our Lord's teaching. Perhaps it is a challenge to other hearts, rather than a gloom upon His own. For has He not answered it by anticipation in chapter xvii., "One shall be taken—the other left." Even when things come to their lowest ebb, God shall still have His own elect, and though they be only one here, one there, they shall keep alive faith and hope and love. We cannot tell how it is to be "on the earth." We can do our best to

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make sure that faith does not fail in ourselves—to Luke xviii. ask Him that in us at least He will not allow it to fail.

“Whom do you find within, O Soul, my brother?

Whom do you find within?

I find a Friend that in secret came;

His scarred hands within

He shields a faint flame.”¹

It takes those scarred hands, and all their power and grace, to keep the flame of faith in us from being blown out by the tempests of this windy world. May He shield it still, against the day of His appearing!

FOR MEDITATION AND PRAYER

After age-long discussion as to what are the essentials of Christian doctrine, Prayer remains the essential. . . . Prayer is the very germ of the new life. Personal asking and receiving is the deepest as well as the simplest mystery of faith, but it is a mystery of Nature too, for it lies at the foundation of all corporate life. Certainly the Quietism that will not exert the individual will upon the Divine and would make prayer something less than insatiable desire, is in direct contradiction to Jesus' most oft-repeated command.

Pro Christo et Ecclesia

¹ Evelyn Underhill.



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